



# BYRON & HIS POETRY

BY

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or possibly  
to the reader by the geographical method of  
interpretation

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## GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

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This is to some extent recognized by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connexion for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life story of the poet who forms its subject. In this attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connexion with his character, his circumstance and the movement of his mind. Then, 1

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addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

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THE fierce light that beats upon a throne has become a proverb for the keenest possible scrutiny of human action and conduct. But that is only a rushlight compared with the glare that illumines the thrones of our kings in the realms of mind. Especially is this true if the monarch is a poet. By the nature of the case, all he thinks and says is reflected in his verse. The very springs of the inner life are laid bare. The follies of a Charles II or of a Louis XV are the talk of the town, or survive for the curious in the memoirs and diaries of observant courtiers. But only external acts are seen and discussed, while the thoughts and feelings which gave these acts their birth die with the heart that cherished them. How much better, for example, do we know the man Chaucer than the man Edward III, the king whose court he adorned ! Or Spenser than Elizabeth ! Or Milton than Charles I ! Or Burns and Wordsworth than George III ! The poet, especially if his gift be lyrical, is a self-revealer, and it is for this reason that he is, during his lifetime, a butt to some and a prophet to others.

Of no poet is this more true than it is of Byron. It was his nature to speak out, and when he was himself his subject he hid nothing, extenuated nothing. "He wore his heart on his sleeve for

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daws to peck at." And so he presented innumerable points of attack to hostile critics, and furnished opportunities of which, to this day, they have not failed to avail themselves. In addition to this, the unhappiness of his parents, their follies and their faults, his own relations with his mother and his wife, were all the subject of discussion down to the minutest detail. And into this discussion was imported a fervour almost religious in its intensity. Byronism became a cult with many ardent souls in this and other countries ; while, with equal fervency, it was execrated by many as springing directly from the author of all evil. The controversy that raged round the name of Byron has been equalled in bitterness only by the fiercest of religious polemics.

But surely it is time to have done with all this. Without apologizing for Byron, or trying to account for him, let us think of him as one who played a great part at a great epoch of the world's history, and who has revealed himself in voluminous verse, and in letters and journals no less voluminous. We shall disregard, then, all the gossip that has been uttered and all the slander that has been written—much of which continues to be circulated and believed—and seek, in Byron's work, to know the man as he was.

"Every Scottishman has a pedigree," says Sir Walter. Byron was half a Scot, and had a pedigree of which any full-blooded Scot might feel proud. On his mother's side it was suf-

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ficiently high. She traced her descent from the poet-king of Scotland, James I, and while yet a girl came into possession of the family estates and castle of Gight in Aberdeenshire. She was inordinately proud of her family—"proud as Lucifer," her son said—and thought that her husband's ancestry was mean beside her own. It is true that he numbered no crowned head among his progenitors, but the Byron family had played an active part at more than one stirring period of English history. One fought under Edward III, and was knighted by him at the siege of Calais; another fought and was knighted on Bosworth field; another, who, with six other Byrons, was on the side of the king at Edgehill, became a prisoner in the hands of the Parliament. In the reign of Henry VIII "little Sir John Byron of the great beard" shared in the spoils of the monasteries, and became possessor of the Priory of Newstead. The first to be ennobled was Sir John Byron, who, for his services to the king during the Civil War, was created Baron Byron of Rochdale. Thereafter, the poet's ancestors included "the Wicked Lord"; "foul-weather Jack," who served as midshipman in Commodore Anson's squadron and himself circumnavigated the globe, meeting with stirring adventures on the way; and, last, "mad Jack Byron," the poet's father. The poet's grand-uncle, "the wicked Lord," dying in 1798, the estates and title passed to him whom a Newstead servant described as "a little boy who lived at Aberdeen."

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The "little boy" was then ten years of age. He had been born at 16 Holles Street, London, on January 22, 1788. Soon after the birth of her son Mrs. Byron removed to Aberdeen, and the northern city was the poet's home till he left Scotland—for good, as it turned out—on his succession to the family estates in 1798. His early experiences resembled those of many another Scottish schoolboy both of those and of later times. The poet's early teachers were Mr. Bowes, called "Bodsy Bowes"; "a decent clever little clergyman named Ross"; Pater-son, a son of Byron's shoemaker, "very serious and saturnine, but kind and, as is common among the Scotch, a good scholar and a rigid Presbyterian." Under Ross, Byron's grand passion was history; and in 1817, when standing on the heights of Tusculum and looking down on Lake Regillus, his thoughts went back to what had been his favourite episode in Roman history and to the old teacher who had made it live for him. Since Byron's early preceptors were either clergymen or were destined for the Church, it is not surprising that he was early introduced to the Bible, and he acquired for the Book a love which never left him. Writing in 1821 he tells us that he had read it through and through before he was eight years old, the Old Testament as a pleasure, the New more as a task. At the age of six Byron went to the Grammar School of Aberdeen, where "he threaded all the classes to the fourth," when he was recalled to England by his uncle's death.

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Byron never saw Scotland again, but he never forgot it. Holiday excursions to Ballatrach or Ballater on Deeside gave him a love of mountain scenery which was a passion with him to the end.

He who first met the Highlands' swelling blue  
Will love each peak that shows a kindred hue,  
Hail in each crag a friend's familiar face,  
And clasp the mountain in his Mind's embrace.  
Long have I roamed through lands which are not  
mine,  
Adored the Alp, and loved the Apennine,  
Revered Parnassus, and beheld the steep  
Jove's Ida and Olympus crown the deep :  
But 'twas not all long ages' lore, nor all  
*Their* nature held me in their thrilling thrall ;  
The infant rapture still survived the boy,  
And Loch-na-gar with Ida looked o'er Troy,  
Mixed Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount,  
And Highland linns with Castalie's clear fount.  
Forgive me, Homer's universal shade !  
Forgive me, Phœbus ! that my fancy strayed ;  
The North and Nature taught me to adore  
Your scenes sublime, from those beloved before.

In 1822, in making his *amende* to Jeffrey, who had been the principal object of Byron's wrath in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," he says :

. . . I am half a Scot by birth, and bred  
A whole one, and my heart flies to my head,—

As "Auld Lang Syne" brings Scotland, one and all,  
Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills, and  
clear streams,

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The Dee—the Don—Balgounie's brig's *black wall*—  
All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams  
Of what I *then dreamt*, clothed in their own pall,—  
Like Banquo's offspring—floating past me seems  
My childhood, in this childishness of mine :—  
I care not—'tis a glimpse of "*Auld Lang Syne*."

And though, as you remember, in a fit  
Of wrath and rhyme, when juvenile and curly,  
I railed at Scots to show my wrath and wit,  
Which must be owned was sensitive and surly,  
Yet 'tis in vain such sallies to permit,  
They cannot quench young feelings fresh and  
early :  
I "*scotched* not killed " the Scotchman in my blood,  
And love the land of " mountain and of flood."

Perhaps the greatest of all the misfortunes from which Byron's early life suffered was the want of a wise and strong guiding hand. His father died before the poet had completed his fourth year, and therefore, till his accession to the title, his mother was his sole guardian. We are all compact of evil and of good, but there can be few persons whose good qualities have been more consistently ignored and whose failings have been more sedulously discussed than were those of Mrs. Byron. That she was ill-balanced and passionate is true ; but she had need of more than stoical fortitude to endure with calmness the misfortunes that fell to her lot. Within eighteen months of their marriage her scape-grace husband had run through her fortune, and she was left with the interest of £4200 as her

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annual income, and that subject to an annuity to the grandmother by whom she had been brought up. When she went with her little boy to settle in Aberdeen it was to live a life of genteel poverty, rendered all the more galling by the splendour of the title to which her son in 1794 became heir. The letters in which she refers to her husband and her losses show courage, sound sense and good feeling. In 1794 she writes to her sister-in-law, Frances Leigh : " You know Lord Byron. Do you think he would do anything for George, or be at any expense to give him a proper education ; or if he wish to do it, is his present fortune such a one that he could spare anything out of it ? You know how poor I am." She herself was not unwilling to make sacrifices for her son, and when he went to Cambridge her only thought was for him. Writing to Hanson, the family lawyer, in 1805, she says, " The two hundred a year addition I shall reserve for myself ; nor can I do with less as my house will always be a home for my son whenever he chooses to come to it." Probably both mother and son were " ill to live with," for most of the harsh and unfilial things that appear in Byron's letters were written when his mother and he lived under one roof. When he wrote from abroad during his two years' absence, his references were always dutiful. " If Mrs. Byron requires any supply pray let her have it at my expense," he writes from Constantinople to Hanson in 1810, " and at all events, whatever becomes of me, do not allow



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her to suffer any privation." Again from Athens he writes in 1811 to the same correspondent, " You will be good enough when you hear from me always to apprise my mother, as she will be anxious, and the arrival of my letters to her is uncertain." To her he wrote regularly, always dutifully, often affectionately, and sometimes playfully. From Smyrna in 1810 he wrote, " Nobody but yourself asks me about my creed—what I am, am not, etc. etc. If I were to begin explaining, I know not where I should leave off ; so we will say no more about that, if you please. I am no ' good soul ' and not an Atheist, but an English gentleman who loves his mother, mankind, and his country."

In 1810 Mrs. Byron had gone to live at Newstead, and her son wrote, " I trust you like Newstead and agree with your neighbours ; but you know *you* are a *vixen*—is not that a dutiful appellation ? " When people joke about each other's failings there is at least an understanding between them.

On August 1, 1811, Mrs. Byron died, her end hastened doubtless by the pecuniary embarrassments which she had had for many years to face. " I heard *one* day of her illness, the next of her death," Byron writes. " Thank God, her last moments were tranquil. I am told she was in little pain, and not aware of her situation. I now feel the truth of Mr. Gray's observation, ' That we can only have one mother.' " And with Byron let us say, " Peace be with the dead ! "

Both mother and son made themselves more

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unhappy than was necessary, but on both sides there was real affection, and on hers a real devotion to her son's welfare, a pride in him, and uncomplaining, courageous self-sacrifice.

### II

**A**FTER eighteen months of fitful attendance at a preparatory school at Dulwich, Byron was entered at Harrow in April 1801. To his mother must be given the credit of having had a true conception of what was due to her son in the matter of education, for it was owing to her insistence that Byron's guardians consented to his being sent to Harrow. From his four years' residence there he probably got as much good as a youth of his temperament was fitted to take. He did not acquire much exact scholarship, but his school friendships were numerous and warm—they were passions with him, he writes. After overcoming his natural antagonism to discipline, he took his full share in the school life, playing in the Eton and Harrow match and taking a notable part in the Harrow Speech Days. He was intensely shy, and hated even to meet strangers on the public road. His mind was brooding, moody and self-centred.

“There is a spot in the churchyard near the footpath on the brow of the hill looking toward Windsor, and a tomb (bearing the name of Peachie or Peachey) where I used to sit for hours and hours. This was my favourite spot.”

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## LINES WRITTEN BENEATH AN ELM IN THE CHURCHYARD OF HARROW

Spot of my youth ! whose hoary branches sigh,  
Swept by the breeze that fans thy cloudless sky ;  
Where now alone I muse, who oft have trod,  
With those I lov'd, thy soft and verdant sod ;  
With those who, scatter'd far, perchance deplore,  
Like me, the happy scenes they knew before :  
Oh ! as I trace again thy winding hill,  
Mine eyes admire, my heart adores thee still,  
Thou drooping Elm ! beneath whose boughs I lay,  
And frequent mus'd the twilight hours away ;  
Where, as they once were wont, my limbs recline,  
But, ah ! without the thoughts which then were mine  
How do thy branches, moaning to the blast,  
Invite the bosom to recall the past,  
And seem to whisper, as they gently swell,  
“ Take, while thou canst, a lingering, last farewell !

When Fate shall chill, at length, this fever'd breast,  
And calm its cares and passions into rest,  
Oft have I thought, 'twould soothe my dying hour,—  
If aught may soothe, when Life resigns her power,—  
To know some humbler grave, some narrow cell,  
Would hide my bosom where it lov'd to dwell ;  
With this fond dream, methinks 'twere sweet to die—  
And here it linger'd, here my heart might lie :  
Here might I sleep where all my hopes arose,  
Scene of my youth, and couch of my repose ;  
For ever stretch'd beneath this mantling shade,  
Press'd by the turf where once my childhood play'd ;  
Wrapt by the soil that veils the spot I lov'd,  
Mix'd with the earth o'er which my footsteps mov'd

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Blest by the tongues that charm'd my youthful ear,  
Mourn'd by the few my soul acknowledged here ;  
Deplor'd by those in early days allied,  
And unremember'd by the world beside.

The lines are conventional and strongly reminiscent of an eighteenth-century model, but they express a mood in which Byron often found himself. The truth is, his mind was obsessed by his physical defect—his lameness. "Dinna speak of it," he had shouted in childish wrath when a chance reference was made to his deformity. And all through his life he thought that people were speaking of it. This was the dark brooding shadow of Byron's earlier years, as his tendency to corpulence was that of his later life. There is an extraordinary variety of opinion as to the nature and extent of Byron's lameness, but two things are certain—that in the attempts to cure it he suffered much at the hands both of regular and irregular practitioners, and that in his early years a sense of resentment and of wrong was cherished which affected his whole after-life.

It does not at first sight seem that a public school is the place where a boy with such a disposition could be happy. At first he was decidedly unhappy and discontented. He was soon at daggers drawn with the house-master, Henry Drury, the son of the head master. In 1803 he refused to return to the school unless he was removed from Drury's house. Byron's propensity at that time was evidently that of

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Cowper—"giggling and making giggle"—or as it reads in Dr. Drury's more scholastic language: "the reason arises from the repeated complaints of Mr. Henry Drury respecting his inattention to business, and a propensity to make others laugh and disregard their employments as much as himself." Both master and boy took themselves very seriously, but fortunately the Head was a wise man, and managed both his son and his pupil with tact and good sense. In after years Byron never mentioned Dr. Drury but with gratitude and respect. As Byron rose in the school he became more attached to it and took a larger share in its activities. Of his pupil's oratorical powers Dr. Drury formed a high opinion. "He has a great notion that I should turn out an orator from my fluency, my turbulence, my voice, my copiousness of declamation and my action. I remember that my first declamation astonished him into some unwonted (for he was economical of such) and sudden compliments before the declaimers at our first rehearsal."

Byron's Harrow years were interrupted by what he himself considered to be his most serious love-affair. In September 1803 he did not return to school at the end of the summer holidays. A letter from Mrs. Byron to the family lawyer, Mr. Hanson, explains the situation. "You may well be surprised, and so may Dr. Drury, that Byron is not returned to Harrow. But the truth is, I cannot get him to return to school, though I have done all in my power for

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six weeks past. He has no indisposition that I know of but love, desperate love, the worst of all maladies, in my opinion. In short, the boy is distractedly in love with Miss Chaworth, and he has not been with me three weeks all the time he has been in this county, but spent all his time at Annesley."

Miss Chaworth was at this time living with her mother at Annesley, near Newstead. The families were tragically connected. It was a grand-uncle of Miss Chaworth who, some forty years before, had been slain in a duel by the fifth Lord Byron. "Our union would have healed feuds," Byron wrote long afterwards, "in which blood had been shed by our fathers; it would have joined lands, broad and rich; it would have joined at least *one* heart and two persons not ill-matched in years (she is two years my elder); and—and—and—what has been the result? She has married a man older than herself, been wretched, and separated. I have married and am separated: and yet *we* are *not* united." In 1805, the year of her marriage to Mr. John Musters, he addressed the following lines to the scene of his boyish love-affair:

### FRAGMENT WRITTEN SHORTLY AFTER THE MARRIAGE OF MISS CHAWORTH

Hills of Annesley, Bleak and Barren,  
Where my thoughtless Childhood stray'd,  
How the northern Tempests, warring,  
Howl above thy tufted Shade!

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Now no more, the Hours beguiling,  
Former favourite Haunts I see ;  
Now no more my Mary smiling,  
Makes ye seem a Heaven to Me.

Many years later he wrote, while living at Geneva in company with Shelley, the following poignant lines. They are of the deepest interest from a biographical point of view, and show that, even after his marriage and separation, Byron had not forgotten the love of his youth.

## THE DREAM

I saw two beings in the hues of youth  
Standing upon a hill, a gentle hill,  
Green and of mild declivity, the last  
As 'twere the cape of a long ridge of such,  
Save that there was no sea to lave its base,  
But a most living landscape, and the wave  
Of woods and corn-fields, and the abodes of men  
Scatter'd at intervals, and wreathing smoke  
Arising from such rustic roofs ;—the hill  
Was crowned with a peculiar diadem  
Of trees, in circular array, so fixed,  
Not by the sport of nature, but of man ;  
These two, a maiden and a youth, were there  
Gazing—the one on all that was beneath  
Fair as herself—but the Boy gazed on her ;  
And both were young, and one was beautiful :  
And both were young—yet not alike in youth.  
As the sweet moon on the horizon's verge,  
The Maid was on the eve of womanhood ;  
The Boy had fewer summers, but his heart  
Had far outgrown his years, and to his eye

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There was but one beloved face on earth,  
And that was shining on him : he had looked  
Upon it till it could not pass away ;  
He had no breath, no being, but in her ;  
She was his voice ; he did not speak to her,  
But trembled on her words ; she was his sight,  
For his eye followed hers, and saw with hers,  
Which coloured all his objects :—he had ceased  
To live within himself ; she was his life,  
The ocean to the river of his thoughts :  
Which terminated all : upon a tone,  
A touch of hers, his blood would ebb and flow,  
And his cheek change tempestuously—his heart  
Unknowing of its cause of agony.  
But she in these fond feelings had no share :  
Her sighs were not for him ; to her he was  
Even as a brother—but no more ; 'twas much,  
For brotherless she was, save in the name  
Her infant friendship had bestowed on him ;  
Herself the solitary scion left  
Of a time-honoured race.—It was a name  
Which pleased him, and yet pleased him not—and  
why ?

Time taught him a deep answer—when she loved  
Another ; even *now* she loved another,  
And on the summit of that hill she stood  
Looking afar if yet her lover's steed  
Kept pace with her expectancy, and flew.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.  
The Boy was sprung to manhood : in the wilds  
Of fiery climes he made himself a home,  
And his soul drank their sunbeams : he was girt  
With strange and dusky aspects ; he was not  
Himself like what he had been ; on the sea  
And on the shore he was a wanderer ;



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There was a mass of many images  
Crowded like waves upon me, but he was  
A part of all ; and in the last he lay  
Reposing from the noontide sultriness,  
Couched among fallen columns, in the shade  
Of ruined walls that had survived the names  
Of those who reared them ; by his sleeping side  
Stood camels grazing, and some goodly steeds  
Were fastened near a fountain ; and a man  
Clad in a flowing garb did watch the while,  
While many of his tribe slumbered around :  
And they were canopied by the blue sky,  
So cloudless, clear, and purely beautiful,  
That God alone was to be seen in heaven.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.  
The Lady of his love ;—Oh ! she was changed  
As by the sickness of the soul ; her mind  
Had wandered from its dwelling, and her eyes  
They had not their own lustre, but the look  
Which is not of the earth ; she was become  
The queen of a fantastic realm ; her thoughts  
Were combinations of disjointed things ;  
And forms impalpable and unperceived  
Of others' sight familiar were to her.  
And this the world calls frenzy ; but the wise  
Have a far deeper madness—and the glance  
Of melancholy is a fearful gift ;  
What is it but the telescope of truth ?  
Which strips the distance of its fantasies,  
And brings life near in utter nakedness,  
Making the cold reality too real !

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.  
The Wanderer was alone as heretofore,  
The beings which surrounded him were gone,

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Or were at war with him ; he was a mark  
For blight and desolation, compassed round  
With Hatred and Contention ; Pain was mixed  
In all which was served up to him, until,  
Like to the Pontic monarch of old days,  
He fed on poisons, and they had no power,  
But were a kind of nutriment ; he lived  
Through that which had been death to many men,  
And made him friends of mountains : with the stars  
And the quick Spirit of the Universe  
He held his dialogues ; and they did teach  
To him the magic of their mysteries ;  
To him the book of Night was open'd wide,  
And voices from the deep abyss reveal'd  
A marvel and a secret—Be it so.

My dream was past ; it had no further change.  
It was of a strange order, that the doom  
Of these two creatures should be thus traced out  
Almost like a reality—the one  
To end in madness—both in misery.

### III

**B**YRON went to Trinity College, Cambridge, in October 1805, and left the University in the spring of 1808, when he obtained, by special privilege as a peer, the degree of M.A. It cannot be said that he owed much to the academic influence by which he was surrounded. Coleridge had gone up to the same University fifteen, and Wordsworth eighteen, years before ; but neither had found the intellectual atmosphere stimulating. Wordsworth, it is true, had taken

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with him the spirit which had breathed the strong air of his native fells and lakes, and found spiritual sustenance even in the very different scenery and surroundings of the lowland country. His mind, too, was in tune with the great associations of the place, and it was not without enthusiasm that he found himself in the University which had numbered Spenser, Marlowe, Milton, Herbert and Gray among its members. But there were no living minds to inspire and guide young and ingenuous souls. In the "Prelude," Wordsworth tells us that

Companionships,  
Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all.  
We sauntered, played, or rioted ; we talked  
Unprofitable talk at morning hours ;  
Drifted about along the streets and walks,  
Read lazily in trivial books, went forth  
To gallop through the country in blind zeal  
Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast  
Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars  
Come forth, perhaps without one quiet thought.

If this is all that Wordsworth—frugal, serious-minded and meditative as he was—had to say for his residence at Cambridge, it is not surprising that Byron had less. Before he had been a month in residence he criticised the College and its ways with all the assurance and censoriousness of a new arrival. "College improves in everything but learning. Nobody here seems to look into an Author, ancient or modern, if they can avoid it. The Muses are totally neglected

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except by a few musty old Sophs and Fellows, who, however agreeable they may be to Minerva, are perfect antidotes to the Graces. Even I (great as is my *inclination* for knowledge) am carried away by the Tide, and have engagements on my hands for a week to come." Byron's opinion of Cambridge did not improve as time went on, and the references to the University in the letters of these years make somewhat melancholy reading. Among the "Detached Thoughts" of 1821 he wrote: "My companions were not unsocial, but the contrary—lively, hospitable, of rank and fortune, and gay far beyond my gaiety. . . . I took my gradations in the vices with great promptitude, but they were not to my taste; for my early passions, though violent in the extreme, were concentrated, and hated division or spreading abroad. I could have left or lost the world with or for that which I loved; but though my temperament was naturally burning I could not share in the commonplace libertinism of the place and time without disgust. And yet this very disgust, and my heart thrown back upon itself, threw me into excesses perhaps more fatal than those from which I shrank, as fixing upon me (at a time) the passions, which, spread amongst many, would have hurt only myself."

But the picture is not all dark. Among the friends whom Byron made at Cambridge was Edward Noel Long, and the Journal of the same year gives in pleasing retrospect an account of the intercourse of the two friends. "We were

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rival swimmers—fond of riding—reading—and of conviviality. We had been at Harrow together ; but—*there*, at least, his was a less boisterous spirit than mine. I was always cricketing—rebellling—fighting—*rowing* (from *row* not *boat-rowing*, a different practice), and in all manner of mischiefs ; while he was more sedate and polished. At Cambridge—both of Trinity—my spirit rather softened, or his roughened, for we became very great friends. Though Cam's is not a very translucent wave, it was fourteen feet deep where we used to dive for, and pick up—having thrown them in on purpose—plates, eggs, and even shillings. I remember, in particular, there was the stump of a tree in the bed of the river, in a spot where we bathed most commonly, round which I used to cling and wonder ' how the devil I came there.'

" Our evenings we passed in music (he was musical, and played on more than one instrument, flute and violoncello), in which I was audience ; and I think our chief beverage was soda-water. In the day we rode, bathed, and lounged, reading occasionally. I remember our buying, with vast alacrity, Moore's new quarto (in 1806) and reading it together in the evenings.

" We only passed the Summer together ; Long had gone into the Guards during the year I passed in Notts, away from College. *His* friendship, and a violent though pure, love and passion—which held me at the same period—were the then romances of the most romantic period of my life."

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During the Cambridge years Byron had already commenced authorship, and before he left the University three volumes of verse were published. In the summer of 1806 a collection called "Fugitive Pieces" was printed at Newark for private circulation. This edition, on the advice of the Rev. J. T. Beecher, was, with the exception of one or two copies, recalled and destroyed by Byron. In January 1807 the same press issued, also for private circulation, "Poems on Various Occasions." Both of these were anonymous, but in the summer of the same year there was issued "Hours of Idleness," by George Gordon, Lord Byron, a Minor. The book had the honour of being noticed by the "Edinburgh Review," the leading critical periodical of the day, and the article was the occasion of Byron's first leap into fame. The "Review," then in its fifth year, had already a reputation for "slashing" articles. "You know," writes Byron, "the system of the Edinburgh gentlemen is one of universal attack. They praise none, and neither the public nor the author expects praise from them." The criticism of the "Hours of Idleness"—the work of Henry, afterwards Lord Brougham—was no exception. It is a true specimen of what Mr. Saintsbury calls the "off-with-his-head" style of criticism. The opinion is delivered with all the truculence of a hectoring judge. There are contemptuous allusions to the author's rank, to his youth, to his scholarship. The words "by Lord Byron, a Minor" in the title-page seem especially to

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have roused the reviewer's wrath. "So far from hearing, with any degree of surprise," he wrote, "that very poor verses were written by a youth from his leaving school to his leaving college, inclusive, we really believe this to be the commonest of all occurrences; that it happens in the life of nine men in ten who are educated in England; and that the tenth man writes better verse than Lord Byron."

Was the scathing denunciation deserved? It is true that there was nothing remarkable in the precocity of the attempt at authorship, nor were the poems themselves intrinsically of high artistic merit. They do not, nor could they, show much depth of real feeling or width of experience. They are largely derivative and several of them are little more than school exercises. But even on the score of intrinsic merit, the Edinburgh Reviewer might have found more to say for the poems than he did. "I have no patience with these reviewers," Wordsworth is reported to have said; "here is a young man, a lord and a minor, who publishes a little volume of poetry; and these fellows attack him as if no one may write poetry unless he lives in a garret. The young man will do something if he goes on."

Wordsworth's remark was a discerning one. Most of the qualities, defects as well as merits, which are found in Byron's later work are found in the poems of these earlier years. There we find the same sweep and impetuosity of feeling and intellect; the same ease and carelessness of

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rhythm ; the same facility and copiousness of rhyme ; the same abounding fluency of poetic utterance ; the same vagueness of impression in the narrative poems. The egotism, the misanthropy, the satire of his later years are all there.

Very characteristic of Byron, on account of its faults as well as of its merits, is

### LACHIN Y GAIR

Away, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses !  
In you let the minions of luxury rove ;  
Restore me the rocks, where the snow-flake reposes,  
Though still they are sacred to freedom and love :  
Yet, Caledonia, belov'd are thy mountains,  
Round their white summits though elements war ;  
Though cataracts foam 'stead of smooth-flowing  
fountains,  
I sigh for the valley of dark Loch na Garr.

Ah ! there my young footsteps in infancy wander'd :  
My cap was the bonnet, my cloak was the plaid ;  
On chieftains, long perish'd, my memory ponder'd,  
As daily I strode through the pine-cover'd glade ;  
I sought not my home, till the day's dying glory  
Gave place to the rays of the bright polar star ;  
For fancy was cheer'd by traditional story,  
Disclos'd by the natives of dark Loch na Garr.

" Shades of the dead ! have I not heard your voices  
Rise on the night-rolling breath of the gale ? "  
Surely, the soul of the hero rejoices,  
And rides on the wind, o'er his own Highland  
vale !



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Round Loch na Garr, while the stormy mist gathers,  
Winter presides in his cold icy car :  
Clouds, there, encircle the forms of my Fathers ;  
They dwell in the tempests of dark Loch na Garr.

“ Ill starr’d, though brave, did no visions foreboding  
Tell you that fate had forsaken your cause ? ”  
Ah ! were you destin’d to die at Culloden,  
Victory crown’d not your fall with applause :  
Still were you happy, in Death’s earthly slumber,  
You rest with your clan, in the caves of Braemar ;  
The Pibroch resounds, to the piper’s loud number,  
Your deeds, on the echoes of dark Loch na Garr.

Years have roll’d on, Loch na Garr, since I left you,  
Years must elapse, ere I tread you again :  
Nature of verdure and flowers has bereft you,  
Yet still are you dearer than Albion’s plain :  
England ! thy beauties are tame and domestic,  
To one who has rov’d on the mountains afar :  
Oh ! for the crags that are wild and majestic,  
The steep, frowning glories of dark Loch na Garr.

The effect of the Edinburgh Reviewer’s treatment on a mind constituted as Byron’s was, may be imagined. But the reaction was not immediate.

The common impression, that Byron, stung by the taunts which Brougham’s article contained, straightway set about composing his retort, is a somewhat erroneous one. Even before the publication of the “ Hours of Idleness ” Byron had been at work on a poem on the model of Pope’s “ Dunciad.” It was to be called “ British Bards,” but was published in

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October 1809 as "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." Contemporary writers are the poet's quarry, and all of them are run down and struck at with the utmost gusto. There is little discrimination, little restraint. Friend and foe alike are castigated ; and poets of established reputation fare no better than the scribblers of a day. To point the contrast between the "Augustan " age and his own degenerate days, Byron lauds Pope and Dryden, Congreve and Otway. But Scott is a "venal " bard ; Coleridge is

To turgid ode and tumid stanza dear ;

Wordsworth

both by precept and example, shows  
That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose.

Jeffrey, the editor of the " Edinburgh Review," and the reputed author of the obnoxious article, is handled roughly but with abundant humour.

The metre of the poem—the heroic couplet—is admirably adapted to verse of this kind. Pope and Dryden had already shown this. Each pair of lines sounds in Dryden's hands like the crack of a whip ; Byron's couplets sound like the angry snap of a man in a rage. The lines are memorable, and some of them, like so many lines and couplets of Pope, have become a common possession.

'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's name in print ;  
A Book's a Book, altho' there's nothing in't.

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A man must serve his time to every trade  
Save censure—critics all are ready made.

Better to err with Pope than shine with Pye.

But, as Byron himself said afterwards of some of the lines, it is all too ferocious. Satire to be convincing must have a worthy aim. Its method may be ridicule, but its object must be reform. Tried by this test, Byron's poem may be an amusing *jeu d'esprit*—though it is too truculent to be wholly amusing—but it is altogether wanting in the nobility of purpose which should characterize a true satire. It is interesting, however, as being Byron's first serious attempt in a literary medium of which he was afterwards to become an acknowledged master.

To this period belong two other satirical works—"Hints from Horace" and "The Curse of Minerva." Both were composed during Byron's first absence abroad, and are dated "March, 1811, from the Capuchin Convent at Athens." The first is inconsiderable, though Byron thought more of it than of his "Childe Harold." But the second is interesting because it gives us our first glimpse of that interest in Greece which afterwards became with Byron an absorbing passion. It deals with a topic of sufficient moment; one, too, which at that time roused an extraordinary interest throughout Europe—the spoliation of Athens by the removal of the sculptures from the Acropolis. While Byron was living in Athens

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the marbles were lying ready packed for removal, and were indeed actually conveyed to England in 1812, and ultimately housed in the British Museum in 1816. Controversy raged fiercely round the artistic value of the marbles as well as round the question of Lord Elgin's right to remove them. If Byron writes sincerely in the "English Bards," he had a low opinion of the former :

Let Aberdeen and Elgin still pursue  
The shade of fame through regions of Virtù ;  
Waste useless thousands on their Phidian freaks,  
Misshapen monuments and maimed antiques ;  
And make their grand saloons a general mart  
For all the mutilated blocks of art.

But of the iniquity of the removal he had no doubt whatever. In lines of striking beauty he describes "the glory that was Greece." Minerva appears and in the poet's hearing utters maledictions on the impious hand that has dared to violate the monuments of Grecian fame. Not only Lord Elgin, but the whole British race, and especially the Scots, to which nation Lord Elgin belonged, are consigned to destruction for the sacrilege. Alaric and Elgin, "the Gothic monarch and the Pictish peer," are coupled together as brethren in the work of destruction. There is much to be said for Byron's anger, but it is questionable whether, if the marbles had not been removed to a place of safety, there would in a short time have been any marbles to remove. And there is no doubt that in the British Museum

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they were accessible to every one, and were the direct cause of a notable revival in poetry, painting and sculpture.

## THE CURSE OF MINERVA

Slow sinks, more lovely ere his race be run,  
Along Morea's hills the setting Sun ;  
Not, as in northern climes, obscurely bright,  
But one unclouded blaze of living light ;  
O'er the hushed deep the yellow beam he throws,  
Gilds the green wave that trembles as it glows ;  
On old Ægina's rock and Hydra's isle  
The God of gladness sheds his parting smile ;  
O'er his own regions lingering loves to shine,  
Though there his altars are no more divine.  
Descending fast, the mountain-shadows kiss  
Thy glorious Gulf, unconquered Salamis !  
Their azure arches through the long expanse  
More deeply purpled, meet his mellowing glance  
And tenderest tints, along their summits driven,  
Mark his gay course, and own the hues of Heaven  
Till, darkly shaded from the land and deep,  
Behind his Delphian rock he sinks to sleep.

On such an eve his palest beam he cast  
When, Athens ! here thy Wisest looked his last.  
How watched thy better sons his farewell ray,  
That closed their murdered Sage's latest day !  
Not yet—not yet—Sol pauses on the hill,  
The precious hour of parting lingers still ;  
But sad his light to agonizing eyes,  
And dark the mountain's once delightful dyes ;  
Gloom o'er the lovely land he seemed to pour,  
The land where Phœbus never frowned before ;  
But ere he sunk below Cithæron's head,

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The cup of Woe was quaffed—the Spirit fled ;  
The soul of Him that scorned to fear or fly,  
Who lived and died as none can live or die.

But lo ! from high Hymettus to the plain  
The Queen of Night asserts her silent reign ;  
No murky vapour, herald of the storm,  
Hides her fair face, or girds her glowing form ;  
With cornice glimmering as the moonbeams play  
There the white column greets her grateful ray,  
And bright around, with quivering beams beset,  
Her emblem sparkles o'er the Minaret :  
The groves of olive scattered dark and wide,  
Where meek Cephissus sheds his scanty tide,  
The cypress saddening by the sacred mosque,  
The gleaming turret of the gay kiosk,  
And sad and sombre 'mid the holy calm,  
Near Theseus' fane, yon solitary palm ;  
All, tinged with varied hues, arrest the eye ;  
And dull were his that passed them heedless by.

Again the Ægean, heard no more afar,  
Lulls his chafed breast from elemental war ;  
Again his waves in milder tints unfold  
Their long expanse of sapphire and of gold,  
Mixed with the shades of many a distant isle  
That frown, where gentler Ocean deigns to smile.

As thus, within the walls of Pallas' fane,  
I marked the beauties of the land and main,  
Alone, and friendless, on the magic shore  
Whose arts and arms but live in poets' lore ,  
Oft as the matchless dome I turned to scan,  
Sacred to Gods, but not secure from Man.  
The Past returned, the Present seemed to cease,  
And Glory knew no clime beyond her Greece !

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Hour rolled along, and Dian's orb on high  
Had gained the centre of her softest sky ;  
And yet unwearied still my footsteps trod  
O'er the vain shrine of many a vanished God :  
But chiefly, Pallas ! thine, when Hecate's glare  
Checked by thy columns, fell more sadly fair  
O'er the chill marble, where the startling tread  
Thrills the lone heart like echoes from the dead.  
Long had I mused, and treasured every trace  
The wreck of Greece recorded of her race,  
When, lo ! a giant-form before me strode,  
And Pallas hailed me in her own Abode !

Yes, 'twas Minerva's self ; but, ah ! how changed,  
Since o'er the Dardan field in arms she ranged !  
Not such as erst, by her divine command,  
Her form appeared from Phidias' plastic hand :  
Gone were the terrors of her awful brow,  
Her idle Ægis bore no Gorgon now ;  
Her helm was dented, and the broken lance  
Seemed weak and shaftless e'en to mortal glance ;  
The Olive Branch, which still she deigned to clasp,  
Shrunk from her touch, and withered in her grasp ;  
And, ah ! though still the brightest of the sky,  
Celestial tears bedimmed her large blue eye ;  
Round the rent casque her owlet circled slow,  
And mourned his mistress with a shriek of woe !

“ Mortal ! ”—’twas thus she spake—“ that blush of  
shame

Proclaims thee Briton, once a noble name ;  
First of the mighty, foremost of the free,  
Now honoured *less* by all, and *least* by me :  
Chief of thy foes shall Pallas still be found.  
Seek'st thou the cause of loathing ?—look around.  
Lo ! here, despite of war and wasting fire,

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I saw successive Tyrannies expire ;  
'Scaped from the ravage of the Turk and Goth,  
Thy country sends a spoiler worse than both.  
Survey this vacant, violated fane ;  
Recount the relics torn that yet remain :  
*These* Cecrops placed, *this* Pericles adorned,  
*That* Adrian reared when drooping Science mourned.  
What more I owe let Gratitude attest—  
Know, Alaric and Elgin did the rest."

She ceased awhile, and thus I dared reply,  
To soothe the vengeance kindling in her eye :  
" Daughter of Jove ! in Britain's injured name,  
A true-born Briton may the deed disclaim.  
Frown not on England ; England owns him not :  
Athena, no ! thy plunderer was a Scot.  
Ask'st thou the difference ? From fair Phyle's  
towers  
Survey Bœotia ;—Caledonia's ours."

" Mortal ! " the blue-eyed maid resumed, " once  
more  
Bear back my mandate to thy native shore.  
Though fallen, alas ! this vengeance yet is mine,  
To turn my counsels far from lands like thine.  
Hear then in silence Pallas' stern behest ;  
Hear and believe, for Time will tell the rest."

Minerva then denounces destruction on Lord  
Elgin, his posterity, and on the nation which had  
abetted his crime, and completes her denuncia-  
tion thus :



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“ 'Tis done, 'tis past—since Pallas warns in vain ;  
The Furies seize her abdicated reign :  
Wide o'er the realm they wave their kindling brands,  
And wring her vitals with their fiery hands.  
But one convulsive struggle still remains,  
And Gaul shall weep ere Albion wear her chains.  
The bannered pomp of war, the glittering files,  
O'er whose gay trappings stern Bellona smiles ;  
The brazen trump, the spirit-stirring drum,  
That bid the foe defiance ere they come ;  
The hero bounding at his country's call.  
The glorious death that consecrates his fall,  
Swell the young heart with visionary charms,  
And bid it antedate the joys of arms.  
But know, a lesson you may yet be taught,  
With death alone are laurels cheaply bought ;  
Not in the conflict Havoc seeks delight,  
His day of mercy is the day of fight.  
But when the field is fought, the battle won,  
Though drenched with gore, his woes are but  
    begun :  
His deeper deeds as yet ye know by name ;  
The slaughtered peasant and the ravished dame,  
The rifled mansion and the foe-reaped field,  
Ill suit with souls at home, untaught to yield.  
Say with what eye along the distant down  
Would flying burghers mark the blazing town ?  
How view the column of ascending flames  
Shake his red shadow o'er the startled Thames ?  
Nay, frown not, Albion ! for the torch was thine  
That lit such pyres from Tagus to the Rhine :  
Now should they burst on thy devoted coast,  
Go, ask thy bosom who deserves them most ?  
The law of Heaven and Earth is life for life,  
And she who raised, in vain regrets, the strife.”

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The descriptive lines with which this poem opens are worthy of note. They are selected by Professor Jebb to prove that Byron had come under the spell of Greece. "He had felt that twofold spell—which Greece makes one—of the mountains and the sea ; his feeling for the large historical memories of the land was ardent and sincere ; but it rested on such slender knowledge that the shapes in which it clothed itself were necessarily vague, and might easily seem conventional, though for him they were not so. . . . But the finer touches are to be found in the Eastern tales written during the three or four years after his return to England—most of all, perhaps, in the ' Corsair ' ; there indeed is heard the voice of one who had been ' spell-bound within the clustering Cyclades.' " <sup>1</sup>

### IV

**W**HEN Byron in his twenty-first year left the University he began to think of what was to a youth of his rank the customary sequel to an academic career—travel. Circumstances, too, were desperate, and the cutting of the knot of his entanglements made the prospect of prolonged absence abroad particularly attractive. He was still stinging from the castigation administered in the

<sup>1</sup> Jebb: "Byron in Greece," pp 144-146. The first fifty-four lines of "The Curse of Minerva" are the lines to which Prof. Jebb refers. They were first printed as the opening stanza of the Third Canto of "The Corsair" [1814]. Evidently Byron did not at first contemplate publication of "The Curse of Minerva"; but he thought, and rightly, that the lines were too good to lose.

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"Edinburgh Review." He was head-over-ears in debt. "I am in my one-and-twentieth year and cannot command as many pounds. To Cambridge I cannot go without paying my bills, and at present I could as soon compass the National Debt ; in London I must not remain, nor shall I, when I can procure a trifle to take me out of it. Home I have none ; and if there was a possibility of getting out of the country, I would gladly avail myself of it. But even that is denied me. My Debts amount to three thousand ; three hundred to Jews, eight hundred to Mrs. B. of Nottingham, to coachmaker and other tradesmen a thousand more, and these must be much increased before they are lessened." He took his seat in the House of Lords in March 1809, and believed himself to have been used infamously by his kinsman and guardian, Lord Carlisle. He writes to his lawyer on April 26, 1809 : "The whole of my wishes are summed up in this : procure me, either of my own or borrowed of others, three thousand pounds, . . . allow me to depart from this cursed country, and I promise to turn Mussulman rather than return to it."

Byron did depart on July 2, 1809, and his journey may be followed in the first and second cantos of the "*Childe Harold*," in the letters he sent home—more than half of those preserved in the "*Letters and Journals*" are to his mother—and in his friend Hobhouse's "*Travels in Albania, and Other Provinces of Turkey*, in 1809 and 1810."

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Byron, accompanied by old Joe Murray, William Fletcher, his valet ("the staunch yeoman" of *Childe Harold's Good Night*), and Robert Rushton, the son of a Newstead tenant and the "little page" of the same poem, set sail from Falmouth for Lisbon. His destination was the "near east"; but a boat for Malta not being convenient, he determined to travel by land across the peninsula from Lisbon to Gibraltar, and thence to Malta. A lucky accident, we may call it, for Byron was thus enabled to see for himself and describe at first hand Portugal, the country on which the eyes of all England were at that time bent. From Lisbon to Cadiz, a five hundred mile ride, occupied till August 6, and the travels of these two months fill Canto I of "*Childe Harold*." On August 16 he sailed from Gibraltar, having first sent home Joe Murray and the homesick Robert Rushton. In the journey from Gibraltar to Malta Byron had as fellow-traveller the Scottish novelist, John Galt. The acquaintanceship begun on board ship ripened afterwards into something of an intimacy, and the two met afterwards on terms of friendship in Greece, though Galt in after years rendered the poet an equivocal service when he published in 1830 his "*Life of Lord Byron*."

On September 19 Byron and his friend Hobhouse sailed from Malta in the brig-of-war "*Spider*." A week later they were off the west coast of Greece, with Ithaca, Actium, the Corinthian Gulf and many another place famous

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in story, within reach. They landed at Previsa and made a journey inland to Janina in Epirus, the capital of a Turkish pachalik. Ali Pacha, "the Rob Roy of Albania," was a remarkable man. Nominally a subject of the Sultan, he aimed at independent power, and by unscrupulous intrigue, by merciless warfare united with military skill of the highest order, he had made himself supreme in Epirus and Albania, had established his predominance over Thessaly, and had pushed his forces as far as the confines of Attica. A nine days' journey from Janina through the most magnificent mountain scenery brought Byron and his friend Hobhouse to Ali's country palace at Tepeleni. The rugged scenery, the ruthless chieftain and his wild band, the mixture of savagery and hospitality interested Byron strongly. From Tepeleni Byron returned to Previsa, and thence travelled by a Turkish warship to Patras, but suffered shipwreck on the voyage. They were treated with the utmost kindness by the men of Suli, on whose shore they were cast. "Not a week ago," Byron writes, "an Albanian chief (every village has its chief who is called Primate), after helping us out of the Turkish galley in her distress, feeding us, and lodging my suite, consisting of Fletcher, a Greek, two Athenians, a Greek priest, and my companion, Mr. Hobhouse, refused any compensation but a written paper saying that I was well received; and when I pressed him to receive a few sequins, 'No,' he replied; 'I wish you to love me, not to pay me.'" They

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travelled overland to Mesolonghi, sailed from there across the Gulf of Patras, where they spent a fortnight. Travelling along the southern shore of the Corinthian Gulf they arrived at Vonitsa, whence they sailed across to Lutraki, and passing by Delphi, the Castalian stream, Parnassus and Helicon, Thebes and Cithæron, they arrived at Athens on Christmas Day 1809. Before the year was out Byron had completed the first canto of "Childe Harold."

Athens at this time detained Byron for more than two months. He lived in the house of Theodora Macri, whose daughter, Theresa, was Byron's "Maid of Athens." Their stay was diversified by excursions to Eleusis, Pentelicus, Sunium and Marathon, and on March 5 Byron sailed for the Asiatic coast of the Ægean and landed at Smyrna. The second canto of "Childe Harold" was completed here, and a few days were spent in a visit to Ephesus. From Smyrna to Constantinople was the next stage, with a halt to visit the Troad, "a very good field for conjecture and snipe-shooting." It was during this part of the journey that Byron swam across the Hellespont, a distance of one mile, though the strength of the current gave him four miles of swimming. Byron was proud of his feat, and mentions it several times both in his letters and in his verses. It is mentioned at least four times in letters to his mother ! At Constantinople Byron remained three months, was received by the Sultan, visited by special permission the mosques, and gathered many

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details that were afterwards turned to account in his *Tales* and in "*Don Juan*." He was back in Athens by July 25, visited at Tripolitza Veli Pacha, son of his old friend Ali of Janina, and thereafter made a tour in the Morea. He returned to Athens in October and stayed in the Franciscan monastery. During the winter he subjected himself to the severest regimen, took a Turkish bath three times a week, drank usually vinegar and water and ate little or nothing but rice. He was busy all the time with "*Hints from Horace*" and the "*Curse of Minerva*." With these and the precious freight of the first half of "*Childe Harold*" he set out from Athens for home on June 3, 1811. Byron was tired of roaming, and, more pressing reason still, money was short. He writes angrily of Hanson's neglect to send remittances. Plans for further travel and a scheme to purchase the island of Ithaca were given up, and Byron landed in England toward the end of July 1811.

Two of the poems which were brought home were not published till later—the "*Curse of Minerva*" in 1828 and "*Hints from Horace*" in 1830, after Byron's death. But in March 1812 there was published by John Murray, of Albemarle Street, "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a Romaunt*."

The poem was an instantaneous success. His own famous phrase was, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous." External circumstances and a certain amount of mystery helped to account for the instantaneous fame of

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

Lord Byron. He had startled the world three years before by the brilliant invective of the "English Bards," and had set all literary society, except his victims, laughing with malicious glee at the keenness of his satiric thrusts. Thereafter he disappeared and spent two years wandering in mysterious lands. From time to time tales reached home which were exaggerated in the telling, and nothing was too wild or extravagant to be believed. He returned, and straightway startled all readers of poetry with another brilliant success of a totally different kind. There is little wonder that he was besieged by visitors and that his presence was eagerly sought after in all the fashionable assemblies of the day.

But the intrinsic qualities of the book were sufficient to account for its popularity. Literary England was waiting for a great poet. Scott had created a taste for verse and had for many years satisfied it to the full, but his poems were now beginning to pall. "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" (1805), "Marmion" (1808), "The Lady of the Lake" (1810) had been received with great though, on the whole, decreasing enthusiasm. In July 1811, Scott published "The Vision of Don Roderick." From a variety of reasons, political, personal and artistic, it was received with less favour than any of its predecessors, and in less than a year Byron's poem, written in the same metre and dealing in part with the same subject, challenged comparison with the work of Scott, who had up to that time



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been looked upon as the reigning monarch of British verse. The subject of the new poem was one of absorbing interest. The whole of the first canto dealt with the Peninsula, where at that very moment British blood was being poured out like water. Byron was in Spain when Talavera was fought—"a pretty victory," he calls it; "two hundred officers and five thousand men killed, all English, and the French in as great force as ever." Moore's victory and death at Corunna were fresh in men's minds. The Convention of Cintra was not forgotten. Wellesley's masterly inactivity behind the lines of Torres Vedras had ended in 1810, and was followed by a series of glorious though, bloody victories. Lisbon, Cintra, Albuera, Gaudiana were household words in the mouths of men and women whose fathers, brothers, or sons were at the front.

The interest which the second canto of "Childe Harold" possessed for Byron's contemporaries is of a different kind from that of the first. It is not contemporary and personal, but it is not less real. The verses roused a response in every heart that could feel the spell of greatness, and that could cherish a regret for its decay. It was Greece, and Greece in bondage to an alien power, that was Byron's subject here. The skies are still blue, the groves still sweet, the green beauties of the Attic plain are still there; Hymettus, Thermopylæ and Marathon still remain to charm and stir the heart—but the people, how changed!

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## LXXIII

Fair Greece ! sad relic of departed Worth !  
Immortal, though no more ; though fallen, great !  
Who now shall lead thy scattered children forth,  
And long accustomed bondage uncreate ?  
Not such thy sons who whilome did await,  
The hopeless warriors of a willing doom,  
In bleak Thermopylæ's sepulchral strait—  
Oh ! who that gallant spirit shall resume,  
Leap from Eurotas' banks, and call thee from the tomb ?

## LXXIV

Spirit of Freedom ! when on Phyle's brow  
Thou sat'st with Thrasybulus and his train,  
Couldst thou forebode the dismal hour which now  
Dims the green beauties of thine Attic plain ?  
Not thirty tyrants now enforce the chain,  
But every carle can lord it o'er thy land ;  
Nor rise thy sons, but idly rail in vain,  
Trembling beneath the scourge of Turkish hand,  
From birth till death enslaved—in word, in deed,  
unmanned.

## LXXV

In all save form alone, how changed ! and who  
That marks the fire still sparkling in each eye,  
Who but would deem their bosoms burned anew  
With thy unquenchéd beam, lost Liberty !  
And many dream withal the hour is nigh  
That gives them back their fathers' heritage :  
For foreign arms and aid they fondly sigh,  
Nor solely dare encounter hostile rage,  
Or tear their name defiled from Slavery's mournful  
page.

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## LXXVI

Hereditary Bondsmen ! know ye not

*Who* would be free *themselves* must strike the  
blow ?

By their right arms the conquest must be wrought ?

Will Gaul or Muscovite redress ye ? No !

True—they may lay your proud despoilers low

But not for you will Freedom's Altars flame.

Shades of the Helots ! triumph o'er your foe !

Greece ! change thy lords, thy state is still the same ;

Thy glorious day is o'er, but not thine years of shame.

We shall see later that the impassioned descriptions and appeals of this canto were not long in bearing fruit, but gave impulse and force to that European movement in favour of the liberation of Greece which was already stirring in the hearts of many who were fired with revolutionary ardour in the cause of freedom.

To read these two cantos is to get a striking lesson in the essential nature of poetry. Why did Byron choose poetry rather than prose, and, the poetical form having been chosen, in what respect does it differ from a prose narrative of the same events ? We are fortunate in being able to make the comparison directly, for we have in the " Letters " and in " Childe Harold " parallel accounts of Byron's travels. In the former we have the detailed story, with times, distances and places mentioned, and descriptions and impressions given with minuteness and fidelity. In the poem, the details are largely omitted, and we have instead mainly the feeling

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that the places and incidents roused in the poet's heart. By the letters, our information is increased about persons and places in which we are interested. And the greater our interest in the persons and places, the greater is the attraction which such a narrative has for us. Even a poor story told by a person who had actually travelled over the battlefields of Spain would have found eager readers. But in reading Byron's poetry the heart is touched. The horrors of war, the sluggishness of the Spaniards, the beauty of Seville and Cadiz, the glory of ancient Greece, the degradation of the modern country under her Moslem rulers, are all made vivid for us, and we share in the poet's feeling for these things. It is this, the suffusion of the whole with emotion, that makes the difference between poetry and prose. Byron chose the poetic medium, too, that he might have free play. Prose narrative is orderly and regular. It proceeds from place to place or from day to day, and must submit to the restrictions of time and place if it is not to lose itself in vagueness. But when feeling is the main element, this regularity is less necessary. In poetry, therefore, the transitions from admiration to indignation, from invective to exhortation, from description to reflection, are frequent, and thus variety, life and movement are lent to the narrative. In addition to the sentiment proper to the poem itself, Byron introduced two other interests. There is the Childe himself. He is gloomy, disillusioned, an exile from a land where nothing

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but suffering has been his lot. The mood, so far as it coincides with the poet's feeling, is half real, half assumed, and wholly nursed and fostered by Byron. Verse rather than prose suits the mysterious, shadowy personage, and prevents us from taking him too seriously. There is also the air of antiquity which Byron in the beginning casts round his poem. This, however, did not go much further than the use of such archaic words as "lo<sup>u</sup>sel," "ne," "ee"; and these accidental aids to romance are discarded when the poet is in the full tide of song, to be employed again only when, toward the end of a canto, the flow of feeling begins to slacken. The truth is Byron needed no help from these adventitious adornments to give his verse its charm. The subject, its variety of treatment, the glow of feeling, are sufficient in themselves.

To illustrate what has been said above regarding the prose and verse rendering of the same subject, let us compare Byron's account of his visit to Ali Pacha contained in the letters to his mother with the account of the same visit which appears in "Childe Harold":

The name of the Pacha is Ali,<sup>1</sup> and he is considered a man of the first abilities: he governs the whole of Albania (the ancient Illyricum), Epirus, and part of Macedonia. His son, Vely Pacha, to whom he has given me letters, governs the Morea, and has great influence in Egypt; in short he is one of the most important men in the Ottoman Empire. When I

<sup>1</sup> Ali is the hero of Maurus Jókai's semi-historical novel "The Lion of Janina" (trans. by Bain, 1897).

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reached Janina, the capital, after a journey of three days over the mountains through a country of the most picturesque beauty, I found that Ali Pacha was with his army in Illyricum, besieging Ibrahim Pacha in the castle of Berat. He had heard that an Englishman of rank was in his dominions, and had left orders in Janina with the commandant to provide a house, and supply me with every kind of necessary *gratis*; and, though I have been allowed to make presents to the slaves, &c., I have not been permitted to pay for a single article of household consumption.

I rode out on the vizier's horses, and saw the palaces of himself and his grandsons; they are splendid, but too much ornamented with silk and gold. I then went over the mountains through Zitza, a village with a Greek monastery (where I slept on my return), in the most beautiful situation (always excepting Cintra, in Portugal) I ever beheld. In nine days I reached Tepeleni. Our journey was much prolonged by the torrents that had fallen from the mountains, and intersected the roads. I shall never forget the singular scene on entering Tepeleni at five in the afternoon, as the sun was going down. It brought to my mind (with some change of *dress*, however) Scott's description of Branksome Castle in his "Lay," and the feudal system. The Albanians, in their dresses (the most magnificent in the world, consisting of a long *white kilt*, gold-worked cloak, crimson-velvet gold-laced jacket and waistcoat, silver mounted pistols and daggers), the Tartars with their high caps, the Turks in their vast pelisses and turbans, the soldiers and black slaves with the horses, the former in groups in an immense large open gallery in front of the palace, the latter placed in a kind of cloister below it, two hundred steeds ready caparisoned to move in a moment, couriers entering or passing out with the

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despatches, the kettle-drums beating, boys calling the hour from the minaret of the mosque, altogether, with the singular appearance of the building itself, formed a new and delightful spectacle to a stranger. I was conducted to a very handsome apartment, and my health inquired after by the vizier's secretary, *à-la-mode Turque*.

The next day I was introduced to Ali Pacha. I was dressed in a full suit of staff uniform, with a very magnificent sabre, &c. The vizier received me in a large room paved with marble ; a fountain was playing in the centre ; the apartment was surrounded by scarlet ottomans. He received me standing ; a wonderful compliment from a Mussulman, and made me sit down on his right hand. I have a Greek interpreter for general use, but a physician of Ali's named Ferelario, who understands Latin, acted for me on this occasion. His first question was, why, at so early an age, I left my country ?—(the Turks have no idea of travelling for amusement). He then said, the English Minister, Captain Leake, had told him I was of a great family, and desired his respects to my mother ; which I now, in the name of Ali Pacha present to you. He said he was certain I was a man of birth, because I had small ears, curling hair, and little white hands, and expressed himself pleased with my appearance and garb. He told me to consider him as a father whilst I was in Turkey, and said he looked on me as his son. Indeed, he treated me like a child, sending me almonds and sugared sherbet, fruit, and sweetmeats, twenty times a day. He begged me to visit him often, and at night, when he was at leisure. I then, after coffee and pipes, retired for the first time. I saw him thrice afterwards. It is singular that the Turks, who have no hereditary dignities and few great families, except the Sultans,

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pay so much respect to birth ; for I found my pedigree more regarded than my title.

Byron's poetic rendering of this is one of his most vivid descriptive passages :

### LIV

Epirus' bounds recede, and mountains fail ;  
Tired of up-gazing still, the wearied eye  
Reposes gladly on as smooth a vale  
As ever Spring yclad in glassy dye :  
Ev'n on a plain no humble beauties lie,  
Where some bold river breaks the long expanse,  
And woods along the banks are waving high,  
Whose shadows in the glassy waters dance,  
Or with the moonbeam sleep in Midnight's solemn  
trance.

### LV

The Sun had sunk behind vast Tomerit,  
And Laos wide and fierce came roaring by ;  
The shades of wonted night were gathering yet,  
When, down the steep banks winding warily,  
Childe Harold saw, like meteors in the sky,  
The glittering minarets of Tepalen,  
Whose walls o'erlook the stream ; and drawing nigh,  
He heard the busy hum of warrior-men  
Swelling the breeze that sighed along the lengthening  
glen.

### LVI

He passed the sacred Haram's silent tower,  
And underneath the wide o'erarching gate  
Surveyed the dwelling of this Chief of power,  
Where all around proclaimed his high estate.  
Amidst no common pomp the Despot sate,



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While busy preparation shook the court,  
Slaves, eunuchs, soldiers, guests, and santons wait  
Within, a palace, and without, a fort—  
Here men of every clime appear to make resort.

## LVII

Richly caparisoned, a ready row  
Of arméd horse, and many a warlike store,  
Circled the wide-extending court below ;  
Above, strange groups adorned the corridore ;  
And oft-times through the area's echoing door  
Some high-capped Tartar spurred his steed away :  
The Turk—The Greek—the Albanian—and the Moor.  
Here mingled in their many-hued array,  
While the deep war-drum's sound announced the close  
of day.

## LVIII

The wild Albanian kirtled to his knee  
With shawl-girt head and ornamented gun,  
And gold-embroidered garments, fair to see ;  
The crimson-scarféd men of Macedon ;  
The Delhi with his cap of terror on,  
And crooked glaive—the lively, supple Greek  
And swarthy Nubia's mutilated son ;  
The bearded Turk that rarely deigns to speak,  
Master of all around, too potent to be meek,

## LIX

Are mixed conspicuous : some recline in groups,  
Scanning the motley scene that varies round ;  
There some grave Moslem to devotion stoops,  
And some that smoke, and some that play, are found ;  
Here the Albanian proudly treads the ground ;  
Half-whispering there the Greek is heard to prate ;

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Hark ! from the Mosque the nightly solemn sound,  
The Muezzin's call doth shake the minaret,  
" There is no god but God !—to prayer—lo ! God is  
great ! "

### V

THE five years which Byron spent in England after his return in July 1812 were filled with experiences of the most striking variety and importance. It was during these years that he was first idolized, then execrated by society ; that he married and was separated from his wife ; that he formed some of his most enduring friendships ; and that he began his series of poetic tales which were to do much to confirm the fame that " Childe Harold " had won for him and which strengthened also the impression of mystery and melancholy to which " Childe Harold " had given rise. In the autumn of 1811 and spring of 1812 Byron was undoubtedly unhappy. The death of his mother afflicted him profoundly ; at the same time came the news of the death by drowning of C. S. Matthews, a Cambridge friend and an intimate of Lord Byron ; John Wingfield, a Harrow friend, Byron's junior, whom he " spoilt by indulgence," died of fever at Coimbra in May 1811 ; in the same month and year died Eddleston, Byron's humble Cambridge friend. " Come to me," he writes to Scrope Davies on August 7—and there is no mistaking

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the poignancy and reality of the feeling—"I am almost desolate, left almost alone in the world."

It was at this time and in the mood induced by this succession of melancholy events that Byron wrote the remarkable series of poems which go by the name of the "Thyrza" poems—"To Thyrza," "Away, away, ye notes of woe," "One struggle more and I am free," "Euthanasia," and "And thou art dead, as young and fair." Who Thyrza was, has never been determined. If Thyrza was a real person, as Lady Byron constantly affirmed, the secret has died with the author. Moore was inclined to think that "the poems were the essence, the abstract spirit of many griefs—a confluence of sad thoughts from many sources of sorrow refined and warmed in their passage through his fancy, and forming there one deep reservoir of mournful feeling." They give expression in language of the deepest pathos to the passionate sense of loss, to that longing, earnest desire for something or some one once possessed, now lost, which the Romans called *desiderium*.

Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus  
Tam cari capitis,

might serve as the motto for them all. There are many references in the poems which seem to be personal, and these may have been suggested as Byron thought of one or another of his friends who had gone from him.

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## AND THOU ART DEAD, AS YOUNG AND FAIR

### I

And thou art dead, as young and fair  
As aught of mortal birth ;  
And form so soft, and charms so rare,  
Too soon returned to Earth !  
Though Earth received them in her bed,  
And o'er the spot the crowd may tread  
In carelessness or mirth,  
There is an eye which could not brook  
A moment on that grave to look.

### 2

I will not ask where thou liest low,  
Nor gaze upon the spot ;  
There flowers or weeds at will may grow,  
So I behold them not :  
It is enough for me to prove  
That what I loved, and long must love,  
Like common earth can rot ;  
To me there needs no stone to tell,  
'Tis Nothing that I loved so well.

### 3

Yet did I love thee to the last  
As fervently as thou,  
Who didst not change through all the past,  
And canst not alter now.  
The love where Death has set his seal,  
Nor age can chill, nor rival steal,  
Nor falsehood disavow :

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And, what were worse, thou canst not see  
Or wrong, or change, or fault in me.

## 4

The better days of life were ours ;  
The worst can be but mine :  
The sun that cheers, the storm that lowers  
Shall never more be thine.  
The silence of that dreamless sleep  
I envy now too much to weep ;  
Nor need I to repine,  
That all those charms have passed away  
I might have watched through long decay.

## 5

The flower in ripened bloom unmatched  
Must fall the earliest prey ;  
Though by no hand untimely snatched,  
The leaves must drop away :  
And yet it were a greater grief  
To watch it withering, leaf by leaf,  
Than see it plucked to-day ;  
Since earthly eye but ill can bear  
To trace the change to foul from fair.

## 6

I know not if I could have borne  
To see thy beauties fade ;  
The night that followed such a morn  
Had worn a deeper shade :  
Thy day without a cloud hath passed,  
And thou wert lovely to the last ;  
Extinguished, not decayed ;  
As stars that shoot along the sky  
Shine brightest as they fall from high.

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## 7

As once I wept, if I could weep,  
My tears might well be shed,  
To think I was not near to keep  
One vigil o'er thy bed ;  
To gaze, how fondly ! on thy face  
To fold thee in a faint embrace,  
Uphold thy drooping head ;  
And show that love, however vain,  
Nor thou nor I can feel again.

## 8

Yet how much less it were to gain,  
Though thou has left me free,  
The loveliest things that still remain,  
Than thus remember thee !  
The all of thine that cannot die  
Through dark and dread Eternity  
Returns again to me,  
And more thy buried love endears  
Than aught, except its living years.

## TO THYRZA

Without a stone to mark the spot,  
And say, what Truth might well have said  
By all, save one, perchance forgot,  
Ah ! wherefore art thou lowly laid ?  
By many a shore and many a sea  
Divided, yet beloved in vain ;  
The Past, the Future fled to thee,  
To bid us meet—no—ne'er again !  
Could this have been—a word, a look,  
That softly said, " We part in peace,"

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Had taught my bosom how to brook,  
With fainter sighs, thy soul's release.  
And didst thou not—since Death for thee  
Prepared a light and pangless dart—  
Once long for him thou ne'er shalt see,  
Who held, and holds thee in his heart ?  
Oh ! who like him had watched thee here ?  
Or sadly marked thy glazing eye,  
In that dread hour ere Death appear,  
When silent Sorrow fears to sigh,  
Till all was past ? But when no more  
'Twas thine to reckon of human woe,  
Affection's heart-drops, gushing o'er,  
Had flowed as fast—as now they flow.  
Shall they not flow, when, many a day,  
In these, to me, deserted towers—  
Ere called but for a time away—  
Affection's mingling tears were ours ?  
Ours too the glance none saw beside ;  
The smile none else might understand ;  
The whispered thought of hearts allied,  
The pressure of the thrilling hand ;  
The kiss, so guiltless and refined,  
That Love each warmer wish forebore ;  
Those eyes proclaimed so pure a mind,  
Ev'n Passion blushed to plead for more—  
The tone, that taught me to rejoice,  
When prone, unlike thee, to repine ;  
The song, celestial from thy voice,  
But sweet to me from none but thine ;  
The pledge we wore—I wear it still,  
But where is thine ?—Ah ! where art thou  
Oft have I borne the weight of ill,  
But never bent beneath till now !  
Well hast thou left in Life's best bloom  
The cup of Woe for me to drain ;

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If rest alone be in the tomb,  
I would not wish thee here again :  
But if in worlds more blest than this  
Thy virtues seek a fitter sphere,  
Impart some portion of thy bliss,  
To wean me from mine anguish here.  
Teach me—too early taught by thee !  
To bear, forgiving and forgiven :  
On earth thy love was such to me ;  
It fain would form my hope in Heaven !

It was at this time that Byron made the first of his speeches in the House of Lords. He wrought hard to make a success of the occasion, and he did so. The subject was the Framework Bill, introduced to make the breaking of the new stocking-frames a capital offence. Byron knew his subject. He had come fresh from the seat of trouble, his own county of Nottingham. He had carefully prepared his speech and had indeed written it out in full beforehand. It bears evidence of careful preparation, but it denounces the proposed legislation with a warmth of conviction that prevents us from being chilled by its evident art. Spoken with that vehemence which Dr. Drury had remarked in him at Harrow, and in an assembly which was accustomed to listen to polished orations, it was certain to make its mark. "My own motion for opposing the bill," he wrote to Lord Holland, "is founded on its palpable injustice, and its certain inefficacy. I have seen the state of these miserable men, and it is a disgrace to a civilized country. Their excesses may be condemned,



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but cannot be a subject of wonder. The effect of the present bill would be to drive them into actual rebellion. The few words I shall venture to offer on Thursday will be founded upon these opinions formed from my own observation on the spot. By previous inquiry I am convinced that these men would have been restored to employment and the country to tranquillity. It is perhaps not yet too late, and it is surely worth the trial. It can never be too late to employ force in such circumstances." Byron returned to the charge in the columns of the "Morning Chronicle," in which appeared on March 2 "An Ode to the Framers of the Framework Bill," and expressed the feelings of his speech and letter with greater directness and point :

Some folks for certain have thought it was shocking,

When Famine appeals and when Poverty groans,  
That Life should be valued at less than a stocking,  
And breaking of frames lead to breaking of bones.  
If it should prove so, I trust, by this token

(And who will refuse to partake in the hope ?)  
That the frames of the fools may be first to be broken,  
Who when asked for a *remedy*, sent down a *rope*.

"Lord Holland tells me that I shall beat them all if I persevere," Byron wrote after the delivery of his speech. It is idle to speculate on what might have been if Byron had persevered. In those early years of the nineteenth century great questions of political and social reform were awaiting solution, and were grappled with and solved before many decades were over. Byron's ardency of spirit, his impatience of

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oppression, his love of freedom and his power of forcible speech seem to mark him out as one who might have played a leading part in the great Reform movements of the first half of the century. But circumstances, partly due to success in another sphere and partly to misfortunes, merited or unmerited, called him away from the path of political fame.

The surprising success of "Childe Harold" was surpassed by that of the series of tales which Byron began to issue in 1813. Byron was the poet of the day, and he supplied what the readers of his time wanted. Eastern tales and tales of mystery were fashionable. The "Giaour" and the "Bride of Abydos" belong to the year 1813 ; the "Corsair" and "Lara" to 1814 ; and the "Siege of Corinth" and "Parisina," with the third canto of "Childe Harold," to 1816. Edition after edition was published ; between June and December 1813 no fewer than seven editions of the "Giaour" were issued, and the poem in its final form contained twice as many lines as appeared in the original issue. Of the "Corsair" ten thousand copies were sold on the day of publication. Having found what the public wanted, Byron continued to supply it with an ease and fluency that were remarkable. He had a deep store of Eastern experience to draw upon. Strange lands, strange men, strange customs were familiar to him. He was an omnivorous reader of Eastern history. The flow of his verse excelled in ease and sweetness that of his

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contemporaries, Moore and Scott. An air of mystery hangs round the heroes of the tales, and Byron was paid the doubtful compliment of being identified in the popular mind with each of them. There are in all the poems passages of the utmost melody and beauty, and public interest was kept alive by the additions that were made in succeeding editions. But we, who have the whole of Byron's work before us, now know that they were far from being the best of which the poet was capable. They are too facile, too fluent ; the pose is too apparent, and the poet is obviously too self-conscious. There is little variety in the plot or in the characters. The story is often vague and confused. Byron, like many another poet, had to "learn in suffering what he taught in song," and his later poems contain his greatest work. Of the poems of this second period of authorship the best is probably "*The Siege of Corinth*," the last but one of the series. The story is founded on the taking of Corinth by the Turks in 1715. The leader of the Turks was an exiled Venetian, Alp, who had been denounced in his native State for some crime unnamed, and who in revenge had lent the aid of his arm to his country's enemies. Not revenge only, however, but love also fired him as he pushed on with fevered energy the siege of Corinth. The Venetian governor of the town was Minotti, and his daughter, Francesca, had been beloved by Alp

In happier mood, and earlier time,  
While unimpeached for traitorous crime,

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Gayest in Gondola or Hall,  
He glittered through the Carnival ;  
And tuned the softest serenade  
That e'er in Adria's waters played  
At midnight to Italian maid.

As Alp watched by the walls of Corinth he was visited by Francesca, who made an impassioned appeal to him to cast off the turban and throw in his lot with the defenders. He resisted all her entreaties :

"Whate'er my fate,  
I am no changeling—'tis too late :  
The reed in storms may bow and quiver,  
*Then rise again ;—the tree must shiver.*  
What Venice made me, I must be,  
Her foe in all, save love to thee :  
But thou art safe : oh, fly with me ! "  
He turned, but she is gone !  
Nothing is there but the column stone.  
Hath she sunk in the earth, or melted in air ?  
He saw not—he knew not—but nothing is there.

The sections which follow (22-27) contain a vigorous description of the assault on the city. The heroes of the conflict are aged Minotti, "the iron of limb," and Alp "with the white arm bare." The lover learns of the death of Francesca, and, fighting desperately, falls—"to the last a Renegade."

### XXII

The night is past, and shines the sun  
As if that morn were a jocund one.  
Lightly and brightly breaks away

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The Morning from her mantle grey,  
And the Noon will look on a sultry day.  
Hark to the trump, and the drum,  
And the mournful sound of the barbarous horn,  
And the flap of the banners, that flit as they're borne,  
And the neigh of the steed, and the multitude's hum,  
And the clash, and the shout, "They come! they  
come!"

The horsetails are plucked from the ground, and the  
sword  
From its sheath; and they form, and but wait for the  
word.

Tartar, and Spahi, and Turcoman,  
Strike your tents, and throng to the van;  
Mount ye, spur ye, skirr the plain,  
That the fugitive may flee in vain,  
When he breaks from the town, and none escape  
Agéd or young, in the Christian shape;  
While your fellows on foot, in a fiery mass,  
Bloodstain the breach through which they pass.  
The steeds are all bridled, and snort to the rein;  
Curved is each neck, and flowing each mane;  
White is the foam of their champ on the bit:  
The spears are uplifted, the matches are lit,  
The cannon are pointed, and ready to roar,  
And crush the wall they have crumbled before:  
Forms in his phalanx each Janizar—  
Alp at their head; his right arm is bare  
So is the blade of his scimitar;  
The Khan and the Pachas are all at their post:—  
The Vizier himself at the head of the host.  
When the culverin's signal is fired, then on;  
Leave not in Corinth a living one—  
A priest at her altars, a chief in her halls,  
A hearth in her mansions, a stone on her walls.  
God and the prophet—Alla Hu!

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

Up to the skies with that wild halloo !

“ There the breach lies for passage, the ladder to scale ;  
And your hands on your sabres, and how should ye  
fail ?

He who first downs with the red cross may crave  
His heart's dearest wish ; let him ask it, and have ! ”  
Thus uttered Coumourgi, the dauntless Vizier ;  
The reply was the brandish of sabre and spear,  
And the shout of fierce thousands in joyous ire :—  
Silence—hark to the signal—fire !

### XXIII

As the wolves, that headlong go  
On the stately buffalo,  
Though with fiery eyes, and angry roar,  
And hoofs that stamp, and horns that gore,  
He tramples on earth, or tosses on high  
The foremost, who rush on his strength but to die :  
Thus against the wall they went,  
Thus the first were backward bent ;  
Many a bosom, sheathed in brass,  
Strewed the earth like broken glass,  
Shivered by the shot, that tore  
The ground whereon they moved no more :  
Even as they fell, in files they lay,  
Like the mower's grass at the close of day,  
When his work is done on the levelled plain ;  
Such was the fall of the foremost slain.

### XXIV

As the spring-tides, with heavy splash,  
From the cliffs invading dash  
Huge fragments, sapped by the ceaseless flow,  
Till white and thundering down they go,  
Like the avalanche's snow

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

On the Alpine vales below ;  
Thus at length, outbreathed and worn,  
Corinth's sons were downward borne  
By the long and oft renewed  
Charge of the Moslem multitude.  
In firmness they stood, and in masses they fell,  
Heaped by the host of the Infidel,  
Hand to hand, and foot to foot :  
Nothing there, save Death, was mute ;  
Stroke. and thrust, and flash, and cry  
For quarter, or for victory,  
Mingle there with the volleying thunder,  
Which makes the distant cities wonder  
How the sounding battle goes,  
If with them, or for their foes ;  
If they must mourn, or may rejoice  
In that annihilating voice,  
Which pierces the deep hills through and through  
With an echo dread and new :  
You might have heard it, on that day,  
O'er Salamis and Megara,  
(We have heard the hearers say,)  
Even unto Piræus' bay.

## XXV

From the point of encountering blades to the hilt  
Sabres and swords with blood were gilt ;  
But the rampart is won, and the spoil begun,  
And all but the after carnage done.  
Shriller shrieks now mingling come  
From within the plundered dome :  
Hark to the haste of flying feet,  
That splash in the blood of the slippery street ;  
But here and there, where 'vantage ground  
Against the foe may still be found,

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

Desperate groups, of twelve or ten,  
Make a pause, and turn again—  
With banded backs against the wall,  
Fiercely stand, or fighting fall.  
There stood an old man—his hairs were white,  
But his veteran arm was full of might :  
So gallantly bore he the brunt of the fray,  
The dead before him, on that day,  
In a semicircle lay ;  
Still he combated unwounded,  
Though retreating, unsurrounded.  
Many a scar of former fight  
Lurked beneath his corslet bright ;  
But of every wound his body bore,  
Each and all had been ta'en before :  
Though agéd, he was so iron of limb,  
Few of our youth could cope with him ;  
And the foes, whom he singly kept at bay  
Outnumbered his thin hairs of silver grey.  
From right to left his sabre swept :  
Many an Othman mother wept  
Sons that were unborn, when dipped  
His weapon first in Moslem gore,  
Ere his years could count a score.  
Of all he might have been the sire  
Who fell that day beneath his ire :  
For, sonless left long years ago,  
His wrath made many a childless foe ;  
And since the day, when in the strait  
His only boy had met his fate,  
His parent's iron hand did doom  
More than a human hecatomb.  
If shades by carnage be appeased,  
Patroclus' spirit less was pleased  
Than his, Minotti's son, who died  
Where Asia's bounds and ours divide.



# BYRON & HIS POETRY

Buried he lay, where thousands before  
For thousands of years were inhumed on the shore ;  
What of them is left, to tell  
Where they lie, and how they fell ?  
Not a stone on their turf, nor a bone in their graves ;  
But they live in the verse that immortally saves.

## XXVI

Hark to the Allah shout ! a band  
Of the Mussulman bravest and best is at hand ;  
Their leader's nervous arm is bare,  
Swifter to smite, and never to spare—  
Unclothed to the shoulder it waves them on ;  
Thus in the fight is he ever known :  
Others a gaudier garb may show,  
To tempt the spoil of the greedy foe ;  
Many a hand's on a richer hilt,  
But none on a steel more ruddily gilt ;  
Many a loftier turban may wear,—  
Alp is but known by the white arm bare ;  
Look through the thick of the fight, 'tis there !  
There is not a standard on that shore  
So well advanced the ranks before ;  
There is not a banner in Moslem war  
Will lure the Delhis half so far ;  
It glances like a falling star !  
Where'er that mighty arm is seen,  
The bravest be, or late have been ;  
There the craven cries for quarter  
Vainly to the vengeful Tartar ;  
Or the hero, silent lying,  
Scorns to yield a groan in dying ;  
Mustering his last feeble blow  
'Gainst the nearest levelled foe,  
Though faint beneath the mutual wound  
Grappling on the gory ground.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XXVII

Still the old man stood erect,  
And Alp's career a moment checked.  
"Yield thee, Minotti ! quarter take,  
For thine own, thy daughter's sake."  
"Never, Renegado, never !  
Though the life of thy gift would last for ever."

"Francesca !—Oh, my promised bride !  
Must she too perish by thy pride ? "

"She is safe."—"Where ? where ?"—"In Heaven ;  
From whence thy traitor soul is driven—  
Far from thee, and undefiled."

*Grimly then Minotti smiled,*  
As he saw Alp staggering bow  
Before his words, as with a blow.

"Oh God ! when died she ?"—"Yesternight—  
Nor weep I for her spirit's flight :  
None of my pure race shall be  
Slaves to Mahomet and thee—  
Come on !"—That challenge is in vain—  
Alp's already with the slain !  
While Minotti's words were wreaking  
More revenge in bitter speaking  
Than his falchion's point had found,  
Had the time allowed to wound,  
From within the neighbouring porch  
Of a long defended church,  
Where the last and desperate few  
Would the failing fight renew,  
The sharp shot dashed Alp to the ground ;  
Ere an eye could view the wound  
That crashed through the brain of the infidel,  
Round he spun, and down he fell ;

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

A flash like fire within his eyes  
Blazed, as he bent no more to rise,  
And then eternal darkness sunk  
Through all the palpitating trunk ;  
Nought of life left, save a quivering  
Where his limbs were slightly shivering :  
They turned him on his back ; his breast  
And brow were stained with gore and dust,  
And through his lips the life-blood oozed,  
From its deep veins lately loosed ;  
But in his pulse there was no throb,  
Nor on his lips one dying sob ;  
Sigh, nor word, nor struggling breath  
Heralded his way to death :  
Ere his very thought could pray  
Unaneled he passed away,  
Without a hope from Mercy's aid,—  
To the last a Renegade.

The defenders are driven to bay in the church which is at the same time the powder magazine of the citadel. The hands of the attacking infidels are outstretched to seize the sacred vessels and plunder the church of its other treasures,

When old Minotti's hand  
Touched with the torch the train—  
    'Tis fired !  
Spire, vaults, the shrine, the spoil, the slain  
    The turbaned victors, the Christian band,  
All that of living or dead remain,  
Hurled on high with the shivered fane  
    In one wild roar expired !

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

The "Siege of Corinth" should be read in full—and aloud. The story is free from the vagueness which mars others of the tales; the characters are natural, and much of the verse is musical and much of it full of vigour.

To this period belongs the beginning of Byron's association with Sir Walter Scott, one of the most notable of literary friendships, and one, too, which shows each of the friends in his best light. Like many another intimacy, it began with a quarrel. Scott had, not unnaturally, resented Byron's contemptuous and unjust reference to him in the "English Bards." Like the Greatheart that he was, however, he ignored the insult, but his feelings may be gathered from a private letter written soon after the publication of the satire. "It is funny enough," he writes, "to see a whelp of a young Lord Byron abusing me, of whose circumstances he knows nothing, for endeavouring to scratch out a living with my pen. God help the bear, if, having little else to eat, he must not even suck his own paws. I can assure the noble imp of fame it is not my fault that I was not born to a park and £5000 a-year, as it is not his lordship's merit, although it may be his great good fortune that he was not born to live by his literary talents or success." Scott had an opportunity of putting his view of the case before Byron and did so in a letter full of dignity on July 3, 1812, and Byron answered with one which does him honour, and in which he communicated to Scott a very flattering conversation he had had with

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

the Prince Regent regarding Scott's poems. The two poets met in the spring of 1815, when Scott passed through London on his way to the Continent. They saw each other daily for an hour or two, and had much conversation on art, poetry, politics and religion. They exchanged gifts—Scott's gift to Byron being a gold-mounted dagger, and Byron's to Scott a large sepulchral vase of silver, full of dead men's bones which, in the month of February 1811, the poet had gathered from certain ancient sepulchres within the Long Walls of Athens. Byron's admiration of Scott was unbounded. He followed his career as novelist with enthusiastic interest and was an assiduous reader of all the Waverley Novels at the earliest moment after their publication; and his correspondence is sown with that particular kind of oblique reference to sayings and characters, unconscious imitation and quotation which show a close and interested study of the Novels.

## VI

THE year 1816 brings us to the crisis of Byron's career. In 1812 he had met and, after a short acquaintance, had proposed marriage to Miss Milbanke. The lady was the daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke and the Hon. Judith Noel, daughter of the first Viscount Wentworth, and heiress to the second Viscount, her uncle. All Miss Milbanke's friends bear

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

witness to the excellence and attractiveness of her character. She was studious, was fond of mathematics, read Greek and theology, and was deeply religious. Her features were not regular enough to be called beautiful ; Byron called her "Pippin" because of the fulness and roundness of her face. But there is in her features, as we see them portrayed in a miniature of 1812, a mingling of piquancy and seriousness which was probably more attractive to the poet than faultless regularity. There is no doubt that she was possessed of considerable strength of character, amounting perhaps to hardness and an unwillingness to make allowance for deficiencies ; and she was certainly implacable and unforgiving. "She was good, amiable and sensible," one of her friends wrote of her, "but cold, prudent and reflecting." It was thought by some of her friends that she would steady Byron, and perhaps she herself had hopes in that direction. Byron proposed marriage in 1812 but was refused. For two years an intimate correspondence was kept up between them, and in September 1814 Byron a second time proposed marriage, by letter on this occasion, and was accepted. Here is Byron's description of his future wife, written between the two proposals, when as yet he believed that he and she were then, and were to be in the future, no more than friends. "What an odd situation and friendship are ours !—without one spark of love on either side, and produced by circumstances which in general lead to coldness on one side,

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and aversion on the other. She is a very superior woman, and very little spoiled, which is strange in an heiress—a girl of twenty—a peeress that is to be, in her own right—an only child, and a *savante*, who has always had her own way. She is a poetess—a mathematician—a metaphysician, and yet, withal, very kind, generous and gentle, with very little pretension. Any other head would be turned with half her acquisitions, and a tenth of her advantages."

They were married on January 2, 1815; their daughter Augusta Ada was born on December 10 of that year; and they separated in January 1816, and never met again. There is no more to tell, although much has been written and more conjectured regarding the reasons that rendered such a step necessary. It is sufficient to say that it changed completely the current of popular favour. Byron became the subject of as much execration as he had formerly been of adulation. In April 1816 he addressed a farewell to Lady Byron and left England—for ever, as it turned out. Byron's time during the year of his married life was largely occupied with work on the Committee of Drury Lane Theatre and with the composition of the "Hebrew Melodies," the latter of which would probably be more in keeping with his wife's tastes and feelings than the former. Whether he wrote them out of deference to her, or simply as words for the music of Nathan, the composer, it is certain that they contain much that is

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## BYRON & HIS POETRY

characteristic of Byron. In them we see re-appearing the Scriptural training of his Calvinistic tutors, and they betray not only an intimate knowledge of the Scripture story but a true appreciation of the feeling to which the events narrated give rise. Every one knows "The Destruction of Sennacherib" and "Vision of Belshazzar." The opening poem is one of peculiar sweetness and beauty. Whether or not Byron was thinking of Wordsworth's "To a Highland Girl" or "She was a Phantom of Delight" as he wrote it we cannot say, but the same thought was in the minds of both poets—that the beautiful sights and sounds of Nature as well as the beauty of goodness pass into and inform the features of all those who give themselves up to these soothing and beneficent agencies.

### SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY

#### I

She walks in Beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies ;  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes :  
Thus mellowed to that tender light  
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies.

#### II

One shade the more, one ray the less,  
Had half impaired the nameless grace  
Which waves in every raven tress,



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Or softly lightens o'er her face ;  
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,  
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

## III

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,  
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,  
But tell of days in goodness spent,  
A mind at peace with all below,  
A heart whose love is innocent !

If Lady Byron preserved a discreet silence on the subject of the separation, Byron showed less wisdom. He felt bitterly his wife's implacability and he relieved his feelings on more than one occasion in verse which is sometimes pungent, sometimes pathetic, and once at least abusive. Lady Byron is the Donna Inez of "Don Juan" ; there is a bitter sting in his epigrams "To Penelope" and "The Charity Ball," both written in 1820 ; and in the last canto of "Childe Harold" the flower-clad ruins of the Coliseum suggest to Byron the well-known lines

Oh, Time ! the Beautifier of the dead,  
Adorner of the ruin,

and remind him that he too will be avenged, and that a just dispenser of right and wrong one day at last will do him the justice which hitherto has been withheld from him. The emotion expressed in these famous stanzas ("Childe Harold," canto iv, 130-138) is overwrought ;

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

the call for vengeance for a personal wrong is an intrusion amid the calm immensity of the Coliseum walls ; and not many persons feel that there is a vital connexion between the two things. But the emotion is sincere, so far as it goes, and represents fairly enough Byron's constant attitude of indignant remonstrance against what he felt to be an undue rigidity on the part of his wife. It was owing to an unhappy accident or to the poet's indiscretion that his separation became the talk of the town and a topic of newspaper discussion. He had printed, for private circulation, the famous lines beginning

· Fare thee well ! and if for ever,  
Still for ever, fare *thee* well ;

and a second poem, entitled " A Sketch," denouncing a maid-servant of Lady Byron's mother, whom the poet had suspected—in all probability, wrongly—of making mischief between his wife and himself. The second was altogether unworthy of Byron, and the first contained intimacies which were not for the eyes of all and sundry. Printed by an indiscreet friend in a morning newspaper, the two poems made the round of the London journals, and every one was talking about Byron, his wife, their separation. It is a miserable story and Byron was glad to escape from it all, as well as from debt and duns and other worries, and left England, as we have seen, in April 1816.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

Byron's destination was Geneva, to which place he was attracted probably by the presence of Shelley. To a carriage accident we are indebted for a delay of some days at Brussels, which gave him the opportunity of visiting the field of Waterloo. He did so in company with a friend, Pryse Gordon, and on his return was asked by Mrs. Gordon to write some lines in her album. Next morning he returned it with the two stanzas beginning

Stop ! for thy tread is on an Empire's dust.

In going over the field Byron asked to be shown the exact spot where Picton fell, "because," he said, "I have heard that my friend Howard was killed at his side, and nearly at the same moment." On being shown the spot, Byron said, "Howard was my relation and dear friend ; but we quarrelled, and I was in the wrong ; we were, however, reconciled, at which I now rejoice."

## XXIX

Their praise is hymned by loftier harps than mine ;  
Yet one I would select from that proud throng,  
Partly because they blend me with his line,  
And partly that I did his Sire some wrong,  
And partly that bright names will hallow song ;  
And his was of the bravest, and when showered  
The death-bolts deadliest the thinned files along,  
Even where the thickest of War's tempest lowered,  
They reached no nobler breast than thine, young,  
gallant Howard !

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

The stanzas on Waterloo are justly celebrated. They are rhetorical, but the rhetoric seems only to give adequate expression to the heightened feeling that stirred in the poet's heart as his mind dwelt on all that had happened there less than a year before. The lines bear marks of fresh and vivid impressions, but it is not so much in detail that they are interesting ; it is rather in the expression they give to the sudden turmoil on the alarm of war, to the grandeur and confused majesty of the actual conflict, and to the pathetic contrasts which war brings!

### XVII

Stop !—for thy tread is on an Empire's dust !  
An Earthquake's spoil is sepulchred below !  
Is the spot marked with no colossal bust ?  
Nor column trophied for triumphal show ?  
None ; but *the moral's truth* tells simpler so.  
As the ground was before, thus let it be ;—  
How that red rain hath made the harvest grow !  
And is this all the world has gained by thee,  
Thou first and last of Fields ! king-making Victory ?

### XVIII

And Harold stands upon this place of skulls,  
The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo !  
How in an hour the Power which gave annuls  
Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too !—  
In " pride of place " here last the Eagle flew,  
Then tore with bloody talon the rent plain,  
Pierced by the shaft of banded nations through ;  
Ambition's life and labours all were vain—  
He wears the shattered links of the World's broken  
chain.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XIX

Fit retribution ! Gaul may champ the bit  
And foam in fetters ;—but is Earth more free ?  
Did nations combat to make *One* submit ?  
Or league to teach all Kings true Sovereignty ?  
What ! shall reviving Thralldom again be  
The patched-up Idol of enlightened days ?  
Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we  
Pay the Wolf homage ? proffering lowly gaze  
And servile knees to Thrones ? No ! *prove* before ye  
praise !

## XX

If not, o'er one fallen Despot boast no more !  
In vain fair cheeks were furrowed with hot tears  
For Europe's flowers long rooted up before  
The trampler of her vineyards ; in vain, years  
Of death, depopulation, bondage, fears,  
Have all been borne, and broken by the accord  
Of roused-up millions : all that most endears  
Glory, is when the myrtle wreathes a Sword—  
Such as Harmodius drew on Athens' tyrant Lord.

## XXI

There was a sound of revelry by night,  
And Belgium's Capital had gathered then  
Her Beauty and her Chivalry—and bright  
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men ;  
A thousand hearts beat happily ; and when  
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,  
Soft eyes looked love to eyes which spake again,  
And all went merry as a marriage bell ;  
But hush ! hark ! a deep sound strikes like a rising  
knell !

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XXII

Did ye not hear it ?—No—'twas but the Wind,  
Or the car rattling o'er the stony street ;  
On with the dance ! let joy be unconfined ;  
No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet  
To chase the glowing Hours with flying feet—  
But hark !—that heavy sound breaks in once more,  
As if the clouds its echo would repeat ;  
And nearer—clearer—deadlier than before !  
Arm ! Arm ! it is—it is—the cannon's opening  
    roar !

## XXIII

Within a windowed niche of that high hall  
Sate Brunswick's fated Chieftain ; he did hear  
That sound the first amidst the festival,  
And caught its tone with Death's prophetic ear ;  
And when they smiled because he deemed it near,  
His heart more truly knew that peal too well  
Which stretched his father on a bloody bier,  
And roused the vengeance blood alone could quell ;  
He rushed into the field, and, foremost fighting, fel

## XXIV

/ Ah ! then and there was hurrying to and fro—  
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,  
And cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago  
Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness—  
And there were sudden partings, such as press  
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs  
Which ne'er might be repeated ; who could guess  
If ever more should meet those mutual eyes,  
Since upon night so sweet such awful morn could  
    rise !

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XXV

And there was mounting in hot haste—the steed,  
The mustering squadron, and the clattering car,  
Went pouring forward with impetuous speed,  
And swiftly forming in the ranks of war—  
And the deep thunder peal on peal afar ;  
And near, the beat of the alarming drum  
Roused up the soldier ere the Morning Star ;  
While thronged the citizens with terror dumb,  
Or whispering, with white lips—"The foe ! They  
come ! they come ! "

## XXVI

And wild and high the "Cameron's Gathering " rose !  
The war-note of Lochiel, which Albyn's hills  
Have heard, and heard, too, have her Saxon foes :—  
How in the noon of night that pibroch thrills,  
Savage and shrill ! But with the breath which fills  
Their mountain pipe, so fill the mountaineers  
With the fierce native daring which instils  
The stirring memory of a thousand years,  
And Evan's—Donald's—fame rings in each clansman's  
ears !

## XXVII

And Ardennes waves above them her green leaves,  
Dewy with Nature's tear-drops, as they pass—  
Grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves,  
Over the unreturning brave,—alas !  
Ere evening to be trodden like the grass  
Which *now* beneath them, but *above* shall grow  
In its next verdure, when this fiery mass  
Of living Valour, rolling on the foe  
And burning with high Hope, shall moulder cold and  
low.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XXVIII      und :   ht bound

Last noon beheld them full of lusty life ;  
Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay ;  
The Midnight brought the signal-sound of .  
The Morn the marshalling in arms,—the Da,  
Battle's magnificently stern array !  
The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which when re  
The earth is covered thick with other clay  
Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,  
Rider and horse,—friend,—foe—in one red bur.  
blent !

Leaving Brussels about the beginning of May, Byron travelled by Basel, Berne, Morat and Lausanne to Geneva. The Rhine, with its majestic flow, its fertile banks, its castled hills and the air of romance which suffused the whole, impressed him greatly, and he gave expression to the feelings of enchantment which many tourists have felt since his day. Indeed, Byron to a large extent did for the Rhine what Scott did for the Highlands of Scotland ; and as many tourists see the Trossachs through the eyes of Scott, so Byron gives to many travellers their lead in their admiration of Rhine scenery.

## THE CASTLED CRAG OF DRACHENFELS

### I

The castled Crag of Drachenfels  
Frowns o'er the wide and winding Rhine  
Whose breast of waters broadly swells  
Between the banks which bear the vine ;



# BYRON & HIS POETRY

rich with blossomed trees,  
which promise corn and wine,  
And there was red cities crowning these,  
The mustering white walls along them shine,  
Went poured a scene, which I should see  
And swift double joy wert thou with me.  
And the

And ne

2

Rouse And peasant girls, with deep blue eyes  
Whi' And hands which offer early flowers,  
Or Walk smiling o'er this Paradise ;  
Above, the frequent feudal towers  
Through green leaves lift their walls of gray ;  
And many a rock which steeply lowers,  
And noble arch in proud decay,  
Look o'er this vale of vintage-bowers ;  
But one thing want these banks of Rhine,—  
Thy gentle hand to clasp in mine !

3

I send the lilies given to me—  
Though long before thy hand they touch  
I know that they must withered be,  
But yet reject them not as such ;  
For I have cherished them as dear,  
Because they yet may meet thine eye,  
And guide thy soul to mine even here,—  
When thou behold'st them drooping nigh,  
And know'st them gathered by the Rhine,  
And offered from my heart to thine !

4

The river nobly foams and flows—  
The charm of this enchanted ground,  
And all its thousand turns disclose

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

Some fresher beauty's varying round :  
The haughtiest breast its wish might bound  
Through life to dwell delighted here ;  
Nor could on earth a spot be found  
To Nature and to me so dear—  
Could thy dear eyes in following mine  
Still sweeten more these banks of Rhine !

### LIX

Adieu to thee, fair Rhine ! How long delighted  
The stranger fain would linger on his way !  
Thine is a scene alike where souls united,  
Or lonely Contemplation thus might stray ;  
And could the ceaseless vultures cease to prey  
On self-condemning bosoms, it were here,  
Where Nature, *nor too sombre nor too gay*,  
Wild but not rude, awful yet not austere,  
Is to the mellow Earth as Autumn to the year.

### LX

Adieu to thee again ! a vain adieu !  
There can be no farewell to scene like thine ;  
The mind is coloured by thy every hue ;  
And if reluctantly the eyes resign  
Their cherished gaze upon thee, lovely Rhine !  
'Tis with the thankful glance of parting praise ;  
More mighty spots may rise—more glaring shine,  
But none unite, in one attaching maze,  
The brilliant, fair, and soft,—the glories of old days.

### LXI

The negligently grand, the fruitful bloom  
Of coming ripeness, the white city's sheen,  
The rolling stream, the precipice's gloom,  
The forest's growth, and Gothic walls between,—

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

The wild rocks shaped, as they had turrets been,  
In mockery of man's art ; and these withal  
A race of faces happy as the scene,  
Whose fertile bounties here extend to all,  
Still springing o'er the banks, though Empires near  
them fall.

## LXII

But these recede. Above me are the Alps,  
The Palaces of Nature, whose vast walls  
Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps,  
And throned Eternity in icy halls  
Of cold Sublimity, where forms and falls  
The Avalanche—the thunderbolt of snow !  
All that expands the spirit, yet appals,  
Gather around these summits, as to show  
How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man  
below.

When, on May 25, Byron arrived at Geneva he found that Shelley was there, having arrived ten or twelve days before him. It was then that the two poets met for the first time, and that one of the most interesting and important of literary friendships had its beginning. With Shelley was Mary Godwin, their little boy of five months old, and Claire Clairmont, the daughter of William Godwin's wife by a previous marriage. The Shelleys' abode was on the southern shore of the lake, and, partly to escape the attention of the English coteries and partly to be near Shelley, Byron crossed to the southern shore also and took up his residence at the Villa Diodati, a few minutes' walk from Shelley's house. The shores of the Lake of Geneva are replete with

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literary associations, and it would be with more than passing interest that Byron would remember that his house derived its name from Jean Diodati, the friend of Milton, with whom the poet stayed in 1639. On June 27 Byron visited Gibbon's house, where twenty-nine years before, to a day, the historian wrote "the last lines of the last page" of his "Decline and Fall," and thereafter, as he tells us in his Autobiography, "took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias which commands a prospect of the country, the lake and the mountains." Byron plucked a sprig of Gibbon's acacia and sent it to John Murray. He traversed all Rousseau's ground, with the "Confessions" and "La Nouvelle Héloïse" as guide, and we have his poetic record of this in stanzas 97 to 104 of canto iii. Five miles north of Geneva is Ferney, Voltaire's estate, and his home from 1759 to 1777. The portraits of Voltaire and Gibbon are fixed for ever with masterly sureness and precision of touch in these two stanzas :

### CVI

The one was fire and fickleness, a child  
Most mutable in wishes, but in mind  
A wit as various,—gay, grave, sage, or wild,—  
Historian, bard, philosopher, combined ;  
He multiplied himself among mankind,  
The Proteus of their talents : But his own  
Breathed most in ridicule,—which, as the wind,  
Blew where it listed, laying all things prone,—  
Now to o'erthrow a fool, and now to shake a throne.

## CVII

The other, deep and slow, exhausting thought,  
 And hiving wisdom with each studious year,  
 In meditation dwelt—with learning wrought,  
 And shaped his weapon with an edge severe,  
 Sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer ;  
 The lord of irony,—that master spell,  
 Which stung his foes to wrath, which grew from fear,  
 And doomed him to the zealot's ready Hell,  
 Which answers to all doubts so eloquently well.

Byron avoided the society of his countrymen, but had much intercourse with Madame de Staël, and met Charles de Bonstetten, the friend and correspondent of the poet Gray, and August von Schlegel. The opinion he had of his countrymen is represented by the following note in his journal : “ I remember, at Chamouni, in the very eyes of Mont Blanc, hearing an Englishwoman exclaim to her party, ‘ Did you ever see anything more *rural* ? ’—as if it was Highgate or Hampstead, or Brompton, or Hayes,—‘ *Rural*,’ quotha !—Rocks, pines, torrents, glaciers, clouds and summits of eternal snow far above them—and ‘ *Rural* ’ ! ”

The year 1816 was, as might be expected from the union of two such minds as those of Byron and Shelley, prolific in literary results. Shelley's output included the “ Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” “ Mont Blanc ” and “ Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni ” ; Byron's, “ The Dream,” “ Prisoner of Chillon,” the third canto of “ Childe Harold,” and the first and second

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acts of "Manfred" ; while Mrs. Shelley's contribution was the weird and fascinating tale of "Frankenstein." There is little doubt that Byron, whether he knew it or not, was powerfully and permanently influenced by his intercourse with his brother-poet. It was through him that for the first time he knew and appreciated the nature poetry of Wordsworth, "the keenest-eyed of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in nature," as Ruskin thought. It is true that Wordsworth carried his claims on behalf of Nature to the verge of paradox, as when he says,

One impulse from a vernal wood  
Will teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good  
Than all the sages can.

But when he urges the healing and restorative effects of Nature on the troubled spirit of man we more readily yield our assent to his doctrine. When, in writing of the Daffodils by Ulleswater, he says,

When on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude ;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills  
And dances with the daffodils,

we feel that he is giving utterance to a common experience. Even when Wordsworth makes this high claim—

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Nature never did betray  
The heart that loved her ; 'tis her privilege  
Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
From joy to joy : for she can so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
Is full of blessings—

we feel that it is justified. But to Byron Nature was not this universal healer. He had suffered from evil tongues, from rash judgments, from sneers and from the dreary intercourse of daily life ; and yet Nature in her sublimest and sweetest forms, in the majesty of the snow-clad mountain peak and in the beauty of lake and woodland, had no healing balm for him. “ I am a lover of Nature,” he writes in his Journal of this year, “ and an admirer of Beauty. But in all this—the recollections of bitterness, and more especially of recent and more home desolation, which must accompany me through life, have preyed upon me here ; and neither the music of the shepherd, the crashing of the avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the glacier, the forest, nor the cloud have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the glory, around, above and

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beneath me." Sharing neither Wordsworth's reasoned belief in the power of Nature to soften and subdue the ills of life, nor Byron's insensitiveness to her healing power, Shelley possessed what neither poet exhibits—a passionate belief in a spirit of Beauty and of Love informing all the multitudinous changes that Nature shows. And thus it is that no poet has given more intimate interpretation to the manifestations of Nature—to the Cloud, the West Wind, Autumn, the Skylark. He was fitted, therefore, to be the mediator between two poets so different as Wordsworth and Byron ; and if, in Byron's poems of this year, we miss the belief in Nature's healing power, there is an appreciation of her majesty and beauty expressed in language that far transcends Wordsworth's in its sweep and passionate intensity. Here are two companion pictures, one of Calm, the other of Storm, which are direct transcripts of Byron's experience during those June days :

### CALM

#### LXXXV

Clear, placid Leman ! thy contrasted lake,  
With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing  
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake  
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.  
This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing  
To waft me from distraction ; once I loved  
Torn Ocean's roar, but thy soft murmuring  
Sounds sweet as if a Sister's voice reproved,  
That I with stern delights should e'er have been so  
moved.



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## LXXXVI

It is the hush of night, and all between  
Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,  
Mellowed and mingling, yet distinctly seen,  
Save darkened Jura, whose cap't heights appear  
Precipitously steep ; and drawing near,  
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,  
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood ; on the ear  
Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,  
Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol  
more.

## LXXXVII

He is an evening reveller, who makes  
His life an infancy, and sings his fill ;  
At intervals, some bird from out the brakes  
Starts into voice a moment, then is still.  
There seems a floating whisper on the hill,  
But that is fancy—for the Starlight dew  
All silently their tears of Love instil,  
Weeping themselves away, till they infuse  
Deep into Nature's breast the spirit of her hues.

## LXXXVIII

Ye Stars ! which are the poetry of Heaven !  
If in your bright leaves we would read the fate  
Of men and empires,—'tis to be forgiven,  
That in our aspirations to be great,  
Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,  
And claim a kindred with you ; for ye are  
A Beauty and a Mystery, and create  
In us such love and reverence from afar,  
That Fortune,—Fame,—Power,—Life, have named  
themselves a Star.

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## LXXXIX

All Heaven and Earth are still—though not in sleep,  
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most ;  
And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep :—  
All Heaven and Earth are still : From the high  
host

Of stars, to the lulled lake and mountain-coast,  
All is centered in a life intense,  
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,  
But hath a part of Being, and a sense  
Of that which is of all Creator and Defence.

## XC

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt  
In solitude, where we are *least* alone ;  
A truth, which through our being then doth melt,  
And purifies from self : it is a tone,  
The soul and source of Music, which makes known  
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm  
Like to the fabled Cytherea's zone,  
Binding all things with beauty ;—'twould disarm  
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to  
harm.

## XCI

Not vainly did the early Persian make  
His altar the high places, and the peak  
Of earth-o'ergazing mountains, and thus take  
A fit and unwall'd temple, there to seek  
The Spirit, in whose honour shrines are weak,  
Upreared of human hands. Come, and compare  
Columns and idol-dwellings—Goth or Greek—  
With Nature's realms of worship, earth and air—  
Nor fix on fond abodes to circumscribe thy  
prayer !

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## STORM

### XCII

The sky is changed !—and such a change ! Oh Night  
And Storm, and Darkness, ye are wondrous strong,  
Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light  
Of a dark eye in Woman ! Far along,  
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among  
Leaps the live thunder ! Not from one lone cloud,  
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,  
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,  
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud !

### XCIII

And this is in the Night :—Most glorious Night !  
Thou wert not sent for slumber ! let me be  
A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,—  
A portion of the tempest and of thee !  
How the lit lake shines, a phosphoric sea,  
And the big rain comes dancing to the earth !  
And now again 'tis black,—and now, the glee  
Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth,  
As if they did rejoice o'er a young Earthquake's  
birth.

### XCIV

Now, where the swift Rhone cleaves his way between  
Heights which appear as lovers who have parted  
In hate, whose mining depths so intervene,  
That they can meet no more, though broken-hearted :  
Though in their souls, which thus each other thwarted,  
Love was the very root of the fond rage  
Which blighted their life's bloom, and then departed :—  
Itself expired, but leaving them an age  
Of years all winters,—war within themselves to  
wage :

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XCV

Now, where the quick Rhone thus hath cleft his way,  
The mightiest of the storms hath ta'en his stand :  
For here, not one, but many, make their play  
And fling their thunder-bolts from hand to hand,  
Flashing and cast around : of all the band,  
The brightest through these parted hills hath forked  
His lightnings,—as if he did understand,  
That in such gaps as Desolation worked,  
There the hot shaft should blast whatever therein  
lurked.

## XCVI

Sky — Mountains — River — Winds — Lake — Light-  
nings ! ye !  
With night, and clouds, and thunder—and a Soul  
To make these felt and feeling, well may be  
Things that have made me watchful ; the far roll  
Of your departing voices, is the knoll  
Of what in me is sleepless,—if I rest.  
But where of ye, O Tempests ! is the goal ?  
Are ye like those within the human breast ?  
Or do ye find, at length, like eagles, some high  
nest ?

## XCVII

Could I embody and unbosom now  
That which is most within me,—could I wreak  
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw  
Soul — heart — mind — passions — feelings — strong  
or weak—  
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,  
Bear, know, feel—and yet breathe—into *one* word,  
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak ;  
But as it is, I live and die unheard,  
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

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The first two acts of the strange supernatural drama of "Manfred" belong to this year ; the third act was written in Italy, rewritten later in Rome, and the whole was published in 1817. It is vain to seek a consecutive story in the chaos of scenes and persons of which this drama is composed. It has become the custom to identify Byron with his heroes, and the custom was followed on the publication of "Manfred." It is always dangerous to attribute to an author the opinions he puts into the mouths of his characters, and although the drama is one which in Byron's circumstances and situation we should expect from him, we shall go far wrong if we say bluntly that the figure is the figure of Manfred, but the voice is the voice of Byron. We must remember that Byron had been but recently bereft of home, country, love, friendship. He was in the company of Shelley, to whom the ideal perfection of Beauty and Love was a commonplace of thought. Nothing is more natural therefore than that he should put into his writing of this time all that was in his heart of passionate regret and longing for the love that he had missed. It is not the lost love of Lady Byron of which we speak ; but that ideal love which fills with passionate longing the heart of man in his most exalted moments.

"Manfred" is read perhaps more for the setting than for the problem it contains, fascinating though that may be. "I have the whole scene of 'Manfred' before me, as if it was but yesterday, and could point it out, spot by spot, torrent

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and all. The germs of that poem may be found in the Journal which I sent to Mrs. Leigh (his half-sister, Augusta) when I went over the Dent de Jamont, and then the Wengern Alp, and Scheideck, and made the giro of the Jungfrau, Schreckhorn, etc. etc., shortly before leaving Switzerland." The region is, indeed, that of Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, little known then, but now familiar to every one who visits Switzerland. "It was the Staubbach and the Jungfrau, and something else, that made me write 'Manfred.'" What that "something else" constitutes the mystery of the drama, but the connexion between the scenery and the drama is patent to all who read Byron's Journal of his Swiss tour of the autumn of 1816. There we find the raw material, as it were, of his poetry; the sketches made by the artist on the spot, to be worked up later in the finished picture. Here is a portion of the entry for September 22: "Arrived at the foot of the Mountain (the Jungfrau, i.e. the Maiden); glaciers; torrents; one of these torrents *nine hundred feet* in height of visible descent. Lodge at the Curate's. Set out to see the Valley (the Lauterbrunnen Thal); heard an Avalanche fall, like thunder; saw Glacier—enormous. Storm came on, thunder, lightning, hail; all in perfection, and beautiful. . . . The torrent is in shape curving over the rock, like the *tail* of a white horse streaming in the wind, such as it might be conceived would be that of the *pale* horse on which *Death* is mounted in the

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Apocalypse. It is neither mist nor water, but something between both ; its immense height gives it a wave, a curve, a spreading here, a condensation there, wonderful and indescribable." The waterfall is the famous Staubbach, and here is Byron's poetical, say rather his metrical, rendering, for the essential poetry is contained in the prose description :

It is not noon—the Sunbow's rays still arch  
The torrent with the many hues of heaven,  
And roll the sheeted silver's waving column  
O'er the crag's headlong perpendicular,  
And fling its line of foaming light along,  
And to and fro, like the pale courser's tail,  
The Giant steed, to be bestrode by Death,  
As told in the Apocalypse.

On the following day "we heard," Byron writes, "the Avalanches falling every five minutes nearly—as if God was pelting the Devil down from Heaven with snow-balls. From where we stood, on the Wengern Alp, we had in view on the other side clouds rising from the opposite valley, curling up perpendicular precipices like the foam of the Ocean of Hell, during a Springtide—it was white, and sulphury, and immeasurably deep in appearance. The side we ascended was (of course) not of so precipitous a nature ; but on arriving at the summit, we looked down the other side upon a boiling sea of cloud, dashing against the crags on which we stood. . . . Passed whole woods of withered pines, all withered ; trunks stripped

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

and barkless, branches lifeless ; done by a single winter,—their appearance reminded me of me and my family." Both of these descriptions are combined in Manfred's despairing speech in Scene 2.

To be thus—

Grey-haired with anguish, like these blasted pines,  
Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,  
A blighted trunk upon a cursèd root,  
Which but supplies a feeling to Decay—  
And to be thus, eternally but thus,  
Having been otherwise ! Now furrowed o'er  
With wrinkles, ploughed by moments, not by years  
And hours, all tortured into ages—hours  
Which I outlive !—Ye toppling crags of ice !  
Ye Avalanches, whom a breath draws down  
In mountainous o'erwhelming, come and crush me !  
I hear ye momentarily above, beneath,  
Crash with a frequent conflict ; but ye pass,  
And only fall on things that still would live ;  
On the young flourishing forest, or the hut  
And hamlet of the harmless villager.  
The mists boil up around the glaciers ; clouds  
Rise curling fast beneath me, white and sulphury,  
Like foam from the roused ocean of deep Hell.

✓Byron rewrote, as has been said, the last act of " Manfred " in Rome, and he introduces there somewhat violently, it must be admitted, a description of the Coliseum which it is interesting to compare with that in " Childe Harold " :

Upon such a night  
I stood within the Coliseum's wall,  
'Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome ;



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The trees which grew along the broken arches  
Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars  
Shone through the rents of ruin ; from afar  
The watch-dog bayed beyond the Tiber ; and  
More near from out the Cæsar's palace came  
The owl's long cry, and, interruptedly,  
Of distant sentinels the fitful song  
Begun and died upon the gentle wind.  
Some cypresses beyond the time-worn breach  
Appeared to skirt the horizon, yet they stood  
Within a bowshot. Where the Cæsars dwelt,  
And dwell the tuneless birds of night, amidst  
A grove which springs through levelled battle-  
ments,  
And twines its roots with the imperial hearths,  
Ivy usurps the laurel's place of growth ;—  
But the gladiators' bloody Circus stands,  
A noble wreck in ruinous perfection,  
While Cæsar's chambers and the Augustan halls,  
Grovel on earth in indistinct decay.—  
And thou didst shine, thou rolling Moon, upon  
All this, and cast a wide and tender light,  
Which softened down the hoar austerity  
Of rugged desolation, and filled up,  
As 'twere anew, the gaps of centuries ;  
Leaving that beautiful which still was so,  
And making that which was not—till the place  
Became religion, and the heart ran o'er  
With silent worship of the Great of old,—  
The dead, but sceptred, Sovereigns, who still rule  
Our spirits from their urns.

'Twas such a night !

All the poems written in the year 1816 bear evidence of the influence of Wordsworth. The

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following stanza expresses a truly Wordsworthian sentiment.

### LXXV

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part  
Of me and of my Soul, as I of them ?  
Is not the love of these deep in my heart  
With a pure passion ? should I not contemn  
All objects, if compared with these ? and stem  
A tide of suffering, rather than forego  
Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm  
Of those whose eyes are only turned below,  
Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not  
glow ?

And many such passages, reminiscent of Wordsworth, but foreign to Byron's own attitude to Nature, are to be found. His fine "Sonnet on Chillon" has the same high seriousness as many of Wordsworth's sonnets ; his poem, "The Prisoner of Chillon," is one of the most restrained and yet one of the most profoundly moving things that Byron wrote ; and much of its interest is derived from the mutual interaction of mind and Nature, of the soul of the prisoner and of bird, cloud, lake and mountain as he sees them through his prison window.

### SONNET ON CHILLON

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind !  
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty ! thou art :  
For there thy habitation is the heart—  
The heart which love of thee alone can bind ;

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

And when thy sons to fetters are consigned—  
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,  
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,  
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.  
Chillon ! thy prison is a holy place,  
And thy sad floor an altar—for 'twas trod,  
Until his very steps have left a trace  
Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,  
By Bonnivard !—May none those marks efface !  
For they appeal from tyranny to God.

## THE PRISONER OF CHILLON

### I

My hair is grey, but not with years,  
Nor grew it white  
In a single night,  
As men's have grown from sudden fears :  
My limbs are bowed, though not with toil,  
But rusted with a vile repose,  
For they have been a dungeon's spoil,  
And mine has been the fate of those  
To whom the goodly earth and air  
Are banned, and barred—forbidden fare ;  
But this was for my father's faith  
I suffered chains and courted death ;  
That father perished at the stake  
For tenets he would not forsake ;  
And for the same his lineal race  
In darkness found a dwelling place ;  
We were seven—who now are one,  
Six in youth, and one in age,  
Finished as they had begun,  
Proud of Persecution's rage ;  
One in fire, and two in field,  
Their belief with blood have sealed,

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Dying as their father died,  
For the God their foes denied ;—  
Three were in a dungeon cast,  
Of whom this wreck is left the last.

### II

There are seven pillars of Gothic mould,  
In Chillon's dungeons deep and old,  
There are seven columns, massy and grey,  
Dim with a dull imprisoned ray,  
A sunbeam which hath lost its way,  
And through the crevice and the cleft  
Of the thick wall is fallen and left ;  
Creeping o'er the floor so damp,  
Like a marsh's meteor lamp :  
And in each pillar there is a ring,  
And in each ring there is a chain ;  
That iron is a cankering thing,  
For in these limbs its teeth remain,  
With marks that will not wear away,  
Till I have done with this new day,  
Which now is painful to these eyes,  
Which have not seen the sun so rise  
For years—I cannot count them o'er,  
I lost their long and heavy score  
When my last brother dropped and died,  
And I lay living by his side.

### III

They chained us each to a column stone,  
And we were three—yet, each alone ;  
We could not move a single pace,  
We could not see each other's face,  
But with that pale and livid light  
That made us strangers in our sight :

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

And thus together—yet apart,  
Fettered in hand, but joined in heart,  
'Twas still some solace in the dearth  
Of the pure elements of earth,  
To hearken to each other's speech,  
And each turn comforter to each  
With some new hope, or legend old,  
Or song heroically bold ;  
But even these at length grew cold.  
Our voices took a dreary tone,  
An echo of the dungeon stone,

    A grating sound, not full and free,  
    As they of yore were wont to be :  
    It might be fancy—but to me  
They never sounded like our own.

## IV

I was the eldest of the three,  
    And to uphold and cheer the rest  
    I ought to do—and did my best—  
And each did well in his degree.

    The youngest, whom my father loved  
Because our mother's brow was given  
To him, with eyes as blue as heaven—

    For him my soul was sorely moved ;  
And truly might it be distressed  
To see such bird in such a nest ;  
For he was beautiful as day—

    (When day was beautiful to me  
As to young eagles, being free)—  
    A polar day, which will not see

A sunset till its summer's gone,  
    Its sleepless summer of long light,  
The snow-clad offspring of the sun :  
And thus he was as pure and bright

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

And in his natural spirit gay,  
With tears for naught but others' ills,  
And then they flowed like mountain rills,  
Unless he could assuage the woe  
Which he abhorred to view below.

### V

The other was as pure of mind,  
But formed to combat with his kind ;  
Strong in his frame, and of a mood  
Which 'gainst the world in war had stood,  
And perished in the foremost rank  
With joy :—but not in chains to pine :  
His spirit withered with their clank,  
I saw it silently decline—  
And so perchance in sooth did mine :  
But yet I forced it on to cheer  
Those relics of a home so dear.  
He was a hunter of the hills,  
Had followed there the deer and wolf ;  
To him this dungeon was a gulf,  
And fettered feet the worst of ills.

### VI

✓ Lake Lemán lies by Chillon's walls :  
A thousand feet in depth below  
Its massy waters meet and flow ;  
Thus much the fathom-line was sent  
From Chillon's snow-white battlement,  
Which round about the wave inthralls :  
A double dungeon wall and wave  
Have made—and like a living grave.  
Below the surface of the lake  
The dark vault lies wherein we lay :  
We heard it ripple night and day ;

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

Sounding o'er our heads it knocked ;  
And I have felt the winter's spray  
Wash through the bars when winds were high  
And wanton in the happy sky ;  
And then the very rock hath rocked,  
And I have felt it shake, unshocked,  
Because I could have smiled to see  
The death that would have set me free.

## VII

I said my nearer brother pined,  
I said his mighty heart declined,  
He loathed and put away his food ;  
It was not that 'twas coarse and rude  
For we were used to hunter's fare,  
And for the like had little care :  
The milk drawn from the mountain goat  
Was changed for water from the moat,  
Our bread was such as captives' tears  
Have moistened many a thousand years,  
Since man first pent his fellow men  
Like brutes within an iron den ;  
But what were these to us or him ?  
These wasted not his heart or limb ;  
My brother's soul was of that mould  
Which in a palace had grown cold,  
Had his free breathing been denied  
The range of the steep mountain's side ;  
But why delay the truth ?—he died.  
I saw, and could not hold his head,  
Nor reach his dying hand—nor dead,—  
Though hard I strove, but strove in vain  
To rend and gnash my bonds in twain.  
He died—and they unlocked his chain,  
And scooped for him a shallow grave

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

Even from the cold earth of our cave.  
I begged them, as a boon, to lay  
His corse in dust whereon the day  
Might shine—it was a foolish thought,  
But then within my brain it wrought,  
That even in death his freeborn breast  
In such a dungeon could not rest.  
I might have spared my idle prayer—  
They coldly laughed—and laid him there :  
The flat and turfless earth above  
The being we so much did love ;  
His empty chain above it leant,  
Such Murder's fitting monument !

### VIII

But he, the favourite and the flower,  
Most cherished since his natal hour,  
His mother's image in fair face,  
The infant love of all his race,  
His martyred father's dearest thought,  
My latest care, for whom I sought  
To hoard my life, that his might be  
Less wretched now, and one day free ;  
He, too, who yet had held untired  
A spirit natural or inspired—  
He, too, was struck, and day by day  
Was withered on the stalk away.  
Oh, God ! it is a fearful thing  
To see a human soul take wing  
In any shape, in any mood :  
I've seen it rushing forth in blood,  
I've seen it on the breaking ocean  
Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,  
I've seen the sick and ghastly bed  
Of Sin delirious with its dread :



# BYRON & HIS POETRY

But these were horrors—this was woe  
 Unmixed with such—but sure and slow :  
 He faded, and so calm and meek,  
 So softly worn, so sweetly weak,  
 So tearless, yet so tender—kind,  
 And grieved for those he left behind ;  
 With all the while a cheek whose bloom  
 Was as a mockery of the tomb,  
 Whose tints as gently sunk away  
 As a departing rainbow's ray ;  
 An eye of most transparent light,  
 That almost made the dungeon bright ;  
 And not a word of murmur—not  
 A groan o'er his untimely lot,—  
 A little talk of better days,  
 A little hope my own to raise,  
 For I was sunk in silence—lost  
 In this last loss, of all the most ;  
 And then the sighs he would suppress  
 Of fainting Nature's feebleness,  
 More slowly drawn, grew less and less :  
 I listened, but I could not hear ;  
 I called, for I was wild with fear ;  
 I knew 'twas hopeless, but my dread  
 Would not be thus admonished ;  
 I called, and thought I heard a sound—  
 I burst my chain with one strong bound,  
 And rushed to him :—I found him not,  
*I only stirred in this black spot,*  
*I only lived, I only drew*  
 The accurséd breath of dungeon-dew ;  
 The last, the sole, the dearest link  
 Between me and the eternal brink,  
 Which bound me to my failing race,  
 Was broken in this fatal place.

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

One on the earth, and one beneath—  
My brothers—both had ceased to breathe !  
I took that hand which lay so still,  
Alas ! my own was full as chill ;  
I had not strength to stir, or strive,  
But felt that I was still alive—  
A frantic feeling, when we know  
That what we love shall ne'er be so.  
    I know not why  
    I could not die,  
I had no earthly hope—but faith,  
And that forbade a selfish death.

### IX

What next befell me then and there  
    I know not well—I never knew—  
First came the loss of light, and air,  
    And then of darkness too :  
I had no thought, no feeling—none—  
Among the stones I stood a stone,  
And was, scarce conscious what I wist,  
As shrubless crags within the mist ;  
For all was blank, and bleak, and grey ;  
It was not night—it was not day ;  
It was not even the dungeon-light,  
So hateful to my heavy sight,  
But vacancy absorbing space,  
And fixedness—without a place ;  
There were no stars—no earth—no time—  
No check—no change—no good—no crime—  
But silence, and a stirless breath  
Which neither was of life nor death ;  
A sea of stagnant idleness,  
Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless !

## X

A light broke in upon my brain,—  
It was the carol of a bird ;  
It ceased, and then it came again,  
The sweetest song ear ever heard,  
And mind was thankful till my eyes  
Ran over with the glad surprise,  
And they that moment could not see  
I was the mate of misery ;  
But then by dull degrees came back  
My senses to their wonted track ;  
I saw the dungeon walls and floor  
Close slowly round me as before,  
I saw the glimmer of the sun  
Creeping as it before had done,  
But through the crevice where it came  
That bird was perched, as fond and tame,  
And tamer than upon the tree ;  
A lovely bird, with azure wings,  
And song that said a thousand things,  
And seemed to say them all for me !  
I never saw its like before,  
I ne'er shall see its likeness more :  
It seemed like me to want a mate,  
But was not half so desolate,  
And it was come to love me when  
None lived to love me so again,  
And cheering from my dungeon's brink,  
Had brought me back to feel and  
think.  
I know not if it late were free,  
Or broke its cage to perch on mine,  
But knowing well captivity,  
Sweet bird ! I could not wish for thine  
Or if it were, in wingéd guise,

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

A visitant from Paradise ;  
For — Heaven forgive that thought ! the  
while

Which made me both to weep and smile—  
I sometimes deemed that it might be  
My brother's soul come down to me ;  
But then at last away it flew,  
And then 'twas mortal well I knew,  
For he would never thus have flown—  
And left me twice so doubly lone,—  
Lone—as the corse within its shroud,  
Lone—as a solitary cloud,

A single cloud on a sunny day,  
While all the rest of heaven is clear,  
A frown upon the atmosphere,  
That hath no business to appear  
When skies are blue, and earth is gay.

### XI

A kind of change came in my fate,  
My keepers grew compassionate ;  
I know not what had made them so,  
They were inured to sights of woe,  
But so it was :—my broken chain  
With links unfastened did remain,  
And it was liberty to stride  
Along my cell from side to side,  
And up and down, and then athwart,  
And tread it over every part ;  
And round the pillars one by one,  
Returning where my walk begun,  
Avoiding only, as I trod,  
My brothers' graves without a sod ;  
For if I thought with heedless tread  
My step profaned their lowly bed,

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

My breath came gaspingly and thick,  
And my crushed heart felt blind and sick.

## XII

I made a footing in the wall,  
It was not therefrom to escape,  
For I had buried one and all,  
Who loved me in a human shape ;  
And the whole earth would henceforth be  
A wider prison unto me :  
No child—no sire—no kin had I,  
No partner in my misery ;  
I thought of this, and I was glad,  
For thought of them had made me mad ;  
But I was curious to ascend  
To my barred windows, and to bend  
Once more, upon the mountains high,  
The quiet of a loving eye.

## XIII

I saw them—and they were the same,  
They were not changed like me in frame ;  
I saw their thousand years of snow  
On high—their wide long lake below,  
And the blue Rhone in fullest flow ;  
I heard the torrents leap and gush  
O'er channelled rock and broken bush ;  
I saw the white-walled distant town,  
And whiter sails go skimming down ;  
And then there was a little isle,  
Which in my very face did smile,  
The only one in view ;  
A small green isle, it seemed no more  
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,  
But in it there were three tall trees,

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,  
And by it there were waters flowing,  
And on it there were young flowers growing,  
Of gentle breath and hue.  
The fish swam by the castle wall,  
And they seemed joyous each and all ;  
The eagle rode the rising blast,  
Methought he never flew so fast  
As then to me he seemed to fly ;  
And then new tears came in my eye,  
And I felt troubled—and would fain  
I had not left my recent chain ;  
And when I did descend again,  
The darkness of my dim abode  
Fell on me as a heavy load ;  
It was as is a new-dug grave,  
Closing o'er one we sought to save,—  
And yet my glance, too much opprest,  
Had almost need of such a rest.

### XIV

It might be months, or years, or days—  
I kept no count, I took no note—  
I had no hope my eyes to raise,  
And clear them of their dreary mote ;  
At last men came to set me free ;  
I asked not why, and recked not where ;  
It was at length the same to me,  
Fettered or fetterless to be,  
I learned to love despair.  
And thus when they appeared at last,  
And all my bonds aside were cast,  
The heavy walls to me had grown  
A hermitage—and all my own !  
And half I felt as they were come

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

To tear me from a second home :  
With spiders I had friendship made,  
And watched them in their sullen trade,  
Had seen the mice by moonlight play,  
And why should I feel less than they ?  
We were all inmates of one place,  
And I, the monarch of each race,  
Had power to kill—yet, strange to tell !  
In quiet we had learned to dwell ;  
My very chains and I grew friends,  
So much a long communion tends  
To make us what we are ;—even I  
Regained my freedom with a sigh.

It will be seen that Byron's attitude to Nature was different from that of Shelley and of Wordsworth. There is little of that inward sympathy with Nature and placid contemplation of her varying moods that are so characteristic of Wordsworth. Neither do we find in Byron that intense vitalizing of natural forces which is Shelley's contribution to the Nature poetry of his time. Byron revelled rather in her grand and awe-inspiring aspects : in the vast spaces of the silent heaven, in the boundless expanse of Ocean, in the gloom of dark forests and of beetling crags ; or in her more terrifying manifestations of thunder, tempest and avalanche. And so it is that much of Byron's nature poetry is rhetorical, and sometimes comes perilously near the fall to which all lofty things are liable ; but, generally, his verse is grand because his subject is, and in dealing with Nature he seldom errs.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## CLXXVIII

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep Sea, and Music in its roar :  
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,  
From these our interviews, in which I steal  
From all I may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
What I can ne'er express—yet can not all conceal.

## CLXXIX

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll !  
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain ;  
Man marks the earth with ruin—his control  
Stops with the shore ;—upon the watery plain  
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain  
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,  
When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,  
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan—  
Without a grave—unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.

## CLXXX

His steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields  
Are not a spoil for him,—thou dost arise  
And shake him from thee ; the vile strength he  
wields  
For Earth's destruction thou dost all despise,  
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies—  
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray  
And howling, to his Gods, where haply lies  
His petty hope in some near port or bay,  
And dashest him again to Earth :—there let him  
lay.



## CLXXXI

The armaments which thunderstrike the walls  
 Of rock-built cities, bidding nations quake,  
 And Monarchs tremble in their Capitals,  
 The oak Leviathans, whose huge ribs make  
 Their clay creator the vain title take  
 Of Lord of thee, and Arbiter of War—  
 These are thy toys, and, as the snowy flake,  
 They melt into thy yeast of waves, which mar  
 Alike the Armada's pride, or spoils of Trafalgar.

## CLXXXII

Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee—  
 Assyria—Greece—Rome—Carthage—what are they ?  
 Thy waters washed them power while they were  
     free,  
 And many a tyrant since ; their shores obey  
 The stranger, slave, or savage ; their decay  
 Has dried up realms to deserts :—not so thou,  
 Unchangeable save to thy wild waves' play ;  
 Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow—  
 Such as Creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

## CLXXXIII

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form  
 Glasses itself in tempests ; in all time,  
 Calm or convulsed—in breeze, or gale, or storm—  
 Icing the Pole, or in the torrid clime  
 Dark-heaving—boundless, endless, and sublime—  
 The image of Eternity—the throne  
 Of the Invisible ; even from out thy slime  
 The monsters of the deep are made—each Zone  
 Obeys thee—thou goest forth, dread, fathomless,  
     alone.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## CLXXXIV

And I have loved thee, Ocean ! and my joy  
Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be  
Borne, like thy bubbles, onward : from a boy  
I wantoned with thy breakers—they to me  
Were a delight ; and if the freshening sea  
Made them a terror—'twas a pleasing fear,  
For I was as it were a Child of thee,  
And trusted to thy billows far and near,  
And laid my hand upon thy mane—as I do here.

✓ Toward the end of 1816 Byron left Switzerland and, crossing the Alps by the Simplon, arrived at Milan about the middle of October. Henceforth, till, within a year of his death, he set out on his heroic enterprise to Greece, his home was " the Paradise of exiles, Italy." He is associated mainly with Venice, where he lived from November 1816 till December 1819 ; and with Ravenna, his home from 1819 till his departure for Greece in July 1823. He stayed for a longer or shorter time at Padua, Bologna and Pisa, and in the spring of 1817 he made his first and only visit to Rome, remaining in that city for three weeks only, from April 29 till May 20. To those who remember Byron's glowing descriptions of Rome contained in the fourth canto of " Childe Harold " the shortness of this stay must seem surprising. But it is not only those who visit Rome who know and love her. To Byron, as to many another, she is the " City of the Soul," and her history, her associations, and her landmarks were as familiar

## BYRON & HIS POETRY

to him as those of London. It was not so much out of actual topographical knowledge that Byron wrote his famous description as from a loving and intimate acquaintance with the many events of which Rome has been the scene. And yet Byron did hard work in sightseeing during these three summer weeks in Rome. "I have been on horseback most of the day, all days since my arrival," he wrote on May 12. Even so, much that was of interest was left unseen, and it was left to his friend Hobhouse to make "a list of objects which he had not noticed, and which he afterwards described in several magnificent stanzas." This suggests the method of the guide-book compiler, but that there is little of that in his verse is due to his previously formed and long cherished love of the "lone mother of dead empires." As Wordsworth said of himself and Yarrow, it was "not by sight alone" that Byron "won" Rome. She was his before he set foot within her walls.

### LXXVIII

Oh, Rome ! my Country ! City of the Soul !  
The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,  
Lone Mother of dead Empires ! and control  
In their shut breasts their petty misery.  
What are our woes and sufferance ? Come and  
see  
The cypress—hear the owl—and plod your way  
O'er steps of broken thrones and temples—Ye !  
Whose agonies are evils of a day—  
A world is at our feet as fragile as our clay.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## LXXIX

The Niobe of nations ! there she stands,  
Childless and crownless, in her voiceless woe ;  
An empty urn within her withered hands,  
Whose holy dust was scattered long ago ;  
The Scipios' tomb contains no ashes now ;  
The very sepulchres lie tenantless  
Of their heroic dwellers : dost thou flow,  
Old Tiber ! through a marble wilderness ?  
Rise, with thy yellow waves, and mantle her  
distress.

## LXXX

The Goth, the Christian—Time—War—Flood, and  
Fire,  
Have dealt upon the seven-hilled City's pride ;  
She saw her glories star by star expire,  
And up the steep barbarian Monarchs ride,  
Where the car climbed the Capitol ; far and wide  
Temple and tower went down, nor left a site :—  
Chaos of ruins ! who shall trace the void,  
O'er the dim fragments cast a lunar light,  
And say, " here was, or is," where all is doubly  
night ?

## LXXXI

The double night of ages, and of her,  
Night's daughter, Ignorance, hath wrapt and wrap  
All round us ; we but feel our way to err :  
The Ocean hath his chart, the Stars their map,  
And Knowledge spreads them on her ample lap ;  
But Rome is as the desert—where we steer  
Stumbling o'er recollections ; now we clap  
Our hands, and cry " Eureka ! " " it is clear "—  
When but some false Mirage of ruin rises near.

## LXXXII

Alas ! the lofty city ! and, alas,  
 The trebly hundred triumphs ! and the day  
 When Brutus made the dagger's edge surpass  
 The Conqueror's sword in bearing fame away !  
 Alas, for Tully's voice, and Virgil's lay,  
 And Livy's pictured page !—but these shall be  
 Her resurrection ; all beside—decay.  
 Alas, for Earth, for never shall we see  
 That brightness in her eye she bore when Rome was  
 free !

Beside this we must place as a companion  
 picture Byron's description of Venice, the city  
 which had an equal place in his affections :

## I

I stood in Venice, on the " Bridge of Sighs "  
 A Palace and a prison on each hand :  
 I saw from out the wave her structures rise  
 As from the stroke of the Enchanter's wand  
 A thousand Years their cloudy wings expand  
 Around me, and a dying Glory smiles  
 O'er the far times, when many a subject land  
 Looked to the wingéd Lion's marble piles,  
 Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred  
 isles !

## II

She looks a sea Cybele, fresh from Ocean,  
 Rising with her tiara of proud towers  
 At airy distance, with majestic motion,  
 A Ruler of the waters and their powers :  
 And such she was ;—her daughters had their dowers  
 From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

Poured in her lap all gems in sparkling showers :  
In purple was she robed, and of her feast  
Monarchs partook, and deemed their dignity increased.

## III

In Venice Tasso's echoes are no more,  
And silent rows the songless Gondolier ;  
Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,  
And Music meets not always now the ear :  
Those days are gone—but Beauty still is here.  
States fall—Arts fade—but Nature doth not die,  
Nor yet forget how Venice once was dear,  
The pleasant place of all festivity,  
The Revel of the earth—the Masque of Italy !

## IV

But unto us she hath a spell beyond  
Her name in story, and her long array  
Of mighty shadows, whose dim forms despond  
Above the Dogeless city's vanished sway ;  
Ours is a trophy which will not decay  
With the Rialto ; Shylock and the Moor,  
And Pierre, can not be swept or worn away—  
The keystones of the Arch ! though all were o'er,  
For us repeopled were the solitary shore.

## XI

The spouseless Adriatic mourns her Lord,  
And annual marriage now no more renewed—  
The Bucentaur lies rotting unrestored,  
Neglected garment of her widowhood !  
St. Mark yet sees his Lion where he stood  
Stand, but in mockery of his withered power,  
Over the proud Place where an Emperor sued,

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

And monarchs gazed and envied in the hour  
When Venice was a Queen with an unequalled  
dower.

## XII

The Suabian sued, and now the Austrian reigns—  
An Emperor tramples where an Emperor knelt ;  
Kingdoms are shrunk to provinces, and chains  
Clank over sceptred cities ; Nations melt  
From Power's high pinnacle, when they have felt  
The sunshine for a while, and downward go  
Like Lauwine loosened from the mountain's belt ;  
Oh for one hour of blind old Dandolo !  
Th' octogenarian chief, Byzantium's conquering foe.

## XIII

Before St. Mark still glow his Steeds of brass,  
Their gilded collars glittering in the sun ;  
But is not Doria's menace come to pass ?  
Are they not bridled ?—Venice, lost and won,  
Her thirteen hundred years of freedom done,  
Sinks, like a sea-weed, unto whence she rose !  
Better be whelmed beneath the waves, and shun,  
Even in Destruction's depth, her foreign foes,  
From whom Submission wrings an infamous repose.

## XIV

In youth She was all glory,—a new Tyre,—  
Her very by-word sprung from Victory,  
The " Planter of the Lion," which through fire  
And blood she bore o'er subject Earth and Sea ;  
Though making many slaves, Herself still free,  
And Europe's bulwark 'gainst the Ottomite ;  
Witness Troy's rival, Candia ! Vouch it, ye  
Immortal waves that saw Lepanto's fight !  
For ye are names no Time nor Tyranny can blight.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XV

Statues of glass—all shivered—the long file  
Of her dead Doges are declined to dust ;  
But where they dwelt, the vast and sumptuous  
pile  
Bespeaks the pageant of their splendid trust ;  
Their sceptre broken, and their sword in rust,  
Have yielded to the stranger : empty halls,  
Thin streets, and foreign aspects, such as must  
Too oft remind her who and what enthrals,  
Have flung a desolate cloud o'er Venice' lovely walls.

## XVI

When Athens' armies fell at Syracuse,  
And fettered thousands bore the yoke of war,  
Redemption rose up in the Attic Muse,  
Her voice their only ransom from afar :  
See ! as they chant the tragic hymn, the car  
Of the o'ermastered Victor stops—the reins  
Fall from his hands—his idle scimitar  
Starts from its belt—he rends his captive's chains,  
And bids him thank the Bard for Freedom and his  
strains.

## XVII

Thus, Venice ! if no stronger claim were thine,  
Were all thy proud historic deeds forgot—  
Thy choral memory of the Bard divine,  
Thy love of Tasso, should have cut the knot  
Which ties thee to thy tyrants ; and thy lot  
Is shameful to the nations,—most of all,  
Albion ! to thee : the Ocean queen should not  
Abandon Ocean's children ; in the fall  
Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery  
wall.



# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## XVIII

I loved her from my boyhood—she to me  
Was as a fairy city of the heart,  
Rising like water-columns from the sea—  
Of Joy the sojourn, and of Wealth the mart ;  
And Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art,  
Had stamped her image in me, and even so,  
Although I found her thus, we did not part ;  
Perchance even dearer in her day of woe,  
Than when she was a boast, a marvel, and a show.

## XIX

I can repeople with the past—and of  
The present there is still for eye and thought,  
And meditation chastened down, enough ;  
And more, it may be, than I hoped or sought ;  
And of the happiest moments which were wrought  
Within the web of my existence, some  
From thee, fair Venice I have their colours caught :  
There are some feelings Time can not benumb,  
Nor Torture shake, or mine would now be cold and  
dumb.

With these, and indeed with all Byron's descriptions of Italy, should be compared the Italian sketches of Turner, especially his " Italy " and his " Venice." The work of the painter is notable for that which it suggests rather than for what is seen ; for the feeling it evokes rather than for the information it gives. So is it with Byron's poetry, and that is why the " Childe Harold " is still the best of guide books to all who would see Italy with the eye of the soul.

# BYRON & HIS POETRY

## VII

**T**O understand the story of Byron's life in Italy some knowledge of Italian history of the time is necessary. Italy then was not the Italy we now know—a kingdom, one and undivided, extending from Sicily to the Alps. The peninsula was divided into many states, all alike ill-governed. To the north-west was the kingdom of Sardinia, including the district of Piedmont and the island of Sardinia. Lombardy and Venetia, the richest and most fertile parts of the land, were crushed by the military rigour of the Austrian power. The centre was under the unenlightened medieval sway of pope and cardinals. The Neapolitan kingdom of the Two Sicilies groaned under a tyrant who, having first granted to his subjects constitutional freedom, afterwards revoked his gift, and filled with the lovers of freedom those prisons which had not improved when Mr. Gladstone visited them and described them to an indignant Europe forty years later. And this widespread oppression was all the more galling because the nations had known and enjoyed the benefit of firm and stable government. This was the gift which Italy received at the hands of Napoleon, a gift which he ensured to her for a period of eighteen years, from 1796 to 1814. "Napoleon, not very tenderly, but most effectually, raised his mother Italy, still but half-conscious, out of the death-trance of two centuries. For half a generation

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he gave her rational and modern government. The old petty despotisms were swept away, and the greater part of the Peninsula was governed as if it were a nation, subject, indeed, to the Napoleonic French Empire, but as the Italian province thereof. The *Code Napoléon* instead of medieval laws ; efficient bureaucracy instead of the arbitrary whims of decadent tyrants by right divine ; modern education on scientific and military lines instead of clerical obscurantism ; the encouragement of the professional and middle classes on the principle of *carrière ouverte aux talents* instead of caste privilege—such was the Napoleonic system by which Italians were educated to become capable in the next generation of rebellion on their own behalf, and ultimately of self-government.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1814 this period of comparative freedom, though under a foreign yoke, came to an end. The old régime was restored in all the Italian states. The patriots who were not thrust into despair either left the country to wait for better days, or were driven into secret and underground plotting. During the three years of Byron's life in Venice few references are made in poetry or in letters to politics ; with his departure for Ravenna in 1819 he was plunged into the troubled sea of Italian political intrigue. Even before his settlement at Ravenna he was an object of interest to the Italian police, whose agents were instructed by their directors at

<sup>1</sup> See "English Songs of Italian Freedom" Intro. p. xi by G. M. Trevelyan

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Venice, Bologna and Rome to "keep a careful watch on this gentleman, who is especially dangerous because his abilities and his abundant wealth enable him to assemble at his house persons of the most cultured class."

In 1820 a widespread insurrectionary movement was on foot throughout Italy. The secret society was known as the Carbonari, and Byron, claimed as *capo* or chief of one of their numerous clubs, was deep in the plot. "There is THAT brewing in Italy," he writes to Murray, "which will speedily cut off all security of communication, and set all your Anglo-travellers flying in all directions, with their usual fortitude in foreign tumults. The Spanish and French affairs have set the Italians in a ferment ; and no wonder : they have been too long trampled on. This will make a sad scene for your exquisite traveller, but not for the resident who naturally wishes a people to redress itself. I shall, if permitted by the natives, remain to see what will come of it, and perhaps to take a turn with them, like Dugald Dalgetty and his horse, in case of business ; for I shall think it by far the most interesting spectacle and moment in existence, to see the Italians send the Barbarians<sup>1</sup> of all nations back to their own dens. I have lived long enough among them to feel more for them than for any other people in existence ; but they want union, and they want principle ; and I doubt their success. However, they will try, probably ; and if they do, it will be a good

<sup>1</sup>The Austrians.

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cause. No Italian can hate an Austrian more than I do ; unless it be the English, the Austrians seem to me the most obnoxious race under the sky."

By the middle of the year 1821 all hope of success in the Italian revolution for which Byron had been assiduously preparing was at an end. He had been deep in the plans of the conspirators ; he had contributed freely of his means to promote the cause ; his house had been a store for arms of all kinds, and he himself had incurred the utmost risk of arrest at the hands of the reactionary governments. It is the noblest period of Byron's life, and does much to redeem him from the charge of dissoluteness and trifling which have been levelled against him on account of his preceding three years' sojourn at Venice. It was in truth then and there that Byron found a cause worthy of being espoused, which called forth his passionate love of freedom, and gave his unbounded energy a noble bent and aim. We have seen that it was Shelley's influence that roused the nobler soul of poetry in Byron ; the other mastering influence in his life was the cause of freedom, first in Italy, and, when that was extinguished, in Greece. But it was all over now. " I thought we should have some business here," he wrote in his Journal on May 1, " and I had furbished up my arms, and got my apparatus ready for taking a turn with the Patriots, having my drawers full of their proclamations, oaths and resolutions, and my lower rooms of their hidden weapons of

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most calibres. But the Neapolitans have betrayed themselves and all the world, and those who would have given their blood for Italy can now only give their tears."

The six years of Byron's Italian life are rendered notable by his continued intercourse with Shelley. In the spring of 1818 Shelley left England for Italy, having in his charge the poet's little daughter Allegra. In August of the same year Shelley visited Byron at Venice, and the two poets had frequent meetings during the autumn. Shelley has preserved two records of Byron's life in Venice. One is in his letters and gives a picture far from pleasant of the life that Byron led in that most dissolute of all cities. Whether or not Shelley rescued him from the slough into which he had fallen we cannot definitely say ; but it was then that Byron took up the Italian cause and gave himself to its prosecution. Up to this time Byron had been self-centred ; his indignation had been spent on wrongs which he himself had suffered. Shelley, on the other hand, was the most unselfish of men. He too had written verse of consuming indignation, but it was directed against forces and causes which, from Oxford days onward, he had considered tyrannical and unjust. It is quite possible, probable indeed, that it was Shelley's passion for Italian freedom that roused a corresponding feeling and led Byron to exchange the enervating atmosphere of Venice for the nobler and more heroic surroundings and enterprises of Ravenna. The other record of the

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poets' intercourse is to be found in Shelley's poem "Julian and Maddalo." The preface contains a portrait of Maddalo, which has the unmistakable features of Lord Byron.

Count Maddalo is a Venetian gentleman of antient family and of great fortune, who, without mixing much in the society of his countrymen, resides chiefly at his magnificent palace in that city. He is a person of the most consummate genius, and capable, if he would direct his energies to such an end, of becoming the redeemer of his degraded country. But it is his weakness to be proud ; he derives, from a comparison of his own extraordinary mind with the dwarfish intellects that surround him, an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life. His passions and his powers are incomparably greater than those of other men ; and instead of the latter having been employed in curbing the former, they have mutually lent each other strength. His ambition preys upon itself for want of objects which it can consider worthy of exertion. I say that Maddalo is proud, because I can find no other word to express the concentrated and impatient feelings which consume him ; but it is on his own hopes and affections that he seems to trample, for in social life no human being can be more gentle, patient, and unassuming than Maddalo. He is cheerful, frank, and witty. His more serious conversation is a sort of intoxication ; men are held by it as by a spell. He has travelled much ; and there is an inexpressible charm in his relation of his adventures in different countries.

The poem itself is a reproduction of the many conversations which the two poets held in their

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evening rides over the sands, or in their gondola journeys among the islands. Their talk was

Such as once, so poets tell  
The devils held within the vales of Hell  
Concerning God, freewill, and destiny ;  
Of all that earth has been or yet may be,  
All that vain men imagine or believe,  
Or hope can paint or suffering may achieve,  
We descanted, and I (for ever still  
Is it not wise to make the best of ill ?)  
Argued against despondency, but pride  
Made my companion take the darker side.  
The sense that he was greater than his kind  
Had struck, methinks, his eagle spirit blind  
By gazing on its own exceeding light.

The poem is extremely interesting, both for the intimate and accurate description of both poets and for its record of the talk of two of the world's greatest men at their best.

Shelley was the most important of Byron's intimates during the Venice-Ravenna period, but there are other two who cannot be passed over without mention. The first was Leigh Hunt, who had suffered imprisonment for the free expression of his political opinions, and especially for unmeasured denunciation of the Prince Regent. That Hunt had suffered in such a cause was enough to commend him both to Byron and Shelley, and an invitation to join them in Italy, seconded by Byron and supported with a loan of £200 from him, was sent by Shelley. The purpose evidently was that they



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should form a literary triumvirate, and that, in the pages of a quarterly journal which they were to establish they should express with perfect freedom, and from the safe retreat of a foreign soil, their opinion of the decadent society of Britain. The journal was started and was named "The Liberal." In its pages appeared some things to which Byron's publisher, Murray, had refused to put his name. The first number, issued in September 1822, contained Byron's tremendous satire, "The Vision of Judgment"; the next contained "Heaven and Hell"; the third, "The Blues"—"a mere buffoonery never meant for publication"; and the fourth and last, Byron's fine translation of Canto I of the "Morgante Maggiore" of Pulci. By this time the literary partnership was broken up—it never, indeed, had any chance of endurance—even before the death of Shelley removed the one who had instigated it. Hunt spent an unhappy year with Byron, remained two years longer in Italy, and in 1825 gladly turned his face toward England again.

The other intimate of those years is the romantic figure of Edward John Trelawny, who died in 1881 in his ninetieth year. The stirring events of his early career are narrated in his "Adventures of a Younger Son," and the story of his friendship with Shelley and Byron is told in "Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron." Between Shelley and Trelawny there existed a deep and tender affection, and all his references to Shelley are in terms of the

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highest admiration. Of Byron he writes more coldly ; in tones, indeed, of depreciation, as if he resented the praise which the one poet gained at the expense, as it seemed to him, of the other. It was Trelawny who played the chief part in the events that followed the drowning of Shelley on July 8. It was he who announced the news to the bereaved friends, who organized the search for the body and arranged for the cremation on the shore of the Gulf of Spezzia. There were present on this occasion the three, Byron, Trelawny and Hunt, and each has left an account of the strange event. " We have been burning the bodies of Shelley and Williams on the seashore," Byron wrote to Thomas Moore, " to render them fit for removal and regular interment. You can have no idea what an extraordinary effect such a funeral pile has, on a desolate shore, with mountains in the background and the sea before, and the singular appearance the salt and frankincense gave to the flame. All of Shelley was consumed, except his *heart*, which would not take the flame and is now preserved in spirits of wine."

Byron's pursuit of pleasure at Venice and his interest in revolutionary schemes at Ravenna did not decrease his literary industry. This, the third poetic period, extending from 1816 to 1823, is the most prolific of the three. To the residence at Venice (1816 to 1819) belong " The Lament of Tasso," " Beppo," " Ode on Venice," " Mazeppa " ; and to the Ravenna period (1819 to 1823) belong the historical tragedies " Marino

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Faliero," "Sardanapalus," "The Two Foscari," "Cain," "Werner" and "The Deformed Transformed." And all the time there appeared at intervals the successive cantos of "Don Juan."

Byron's dramas were never read so eagerly as his poems were. This is due in part to the fact that they *are* dramas, and a drama is intended to be acted and seen, not read. Unless the language is more than ordinarily lofty, or the characters, plot and incidents more than ordinarily interesting, a drama requires the powerful aid of human voice and gesture. We read "Hamlet" for the depth of its thought, for the problems it raises, for the interest of its characters. There are many to whom these are the main thing and who would rather read "Hamlet" than see it acted. But it cannot be said that any one of Byron's dramas contains those deep springs of interest of which we have spoken. Nor do they contain the interest of plot and variety of incident and character that would make them good acting dramas. They contain many fine declamatory passages, but there is little or no development of character, such as holds the spectator or the reader spell-bound in the presence of such a figure as Macbeth. That the change in Macbeth's nature is entirely explicable is what constitutes its peculiar interest. The spectator feels that, given similar circumstances and opportunities, he too might be guilty of similar crimes. And so it is with mingled feelings of pity and terror

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that he looks on as Macbeth marches to his doom—pity for the tragic hero, and terror at his fate, for might not any one suffer as he does? These, the noblest emotions which tragedy can rouse in our hearts, Byron does not succeed in rousing in any great degree. The character of the hero does not evolve, and the catastrophe is not in any necessary way connected with that character. He is at the end of Byron's play what he is at the beginning, and the events of the drama are accidental and do not proceed, as it were, from the nature of things. In addition to this, Byron hampered himself by a resolution to produce "regular" plays—plays, that is, which adhered to the academic unities of time, place and action. The result was to render the plays stiff and formal, uninteresting to read, as plays, and impossible to place on the stage with any hope of success. It is true that Byron disclaimed all intention of writing for the theatre; and if we take him at his word and read his plays, not as plays, but as poems cast for the sake of energetic expression into the dramatic form, and divided into parts called acts, we shall find them not uninteresting.

"Marino Faliero" is one of Byron's historical dramas, and one which illustrates well what has been said above regarding Byron's dramas in general. Faliero, now eighty years of age, is Doge of Venice. He was in earlier life a trusted soldier in the service of the Republic, and has gained honour for her arms many times both by land and sea. He is married to a young

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wife, Angiolina, whom he devotedly loves, and who is equally attached to him. A ribald jest passed upon her fair name by a dissolute young patrician, Michel Steno, and scrawled by him on the ducal throne, rouses the Doge to anger. Steno is tried before the Forty, and the play opens in the ducal palace with Faliero waiting to hear the doom which has been pronounced against the offender. When the Doge reads that the sentence is the paltry one of a month's imprisonment his anger knows no bounds. In conversation with his nephew, Bertuccio Faliero, he gives reign to his passion.

*Ber. F.*

*And what redress*

*Did you expect as his fit punishment ?*

*Doge.* Death ! Was I not the Sovereign of the state—

Insulted on his very throne, and made  
A mockery to the men who should obey me ?  
Was I not injured as a husband ? scorned  
As man ? reviled, degraded, as a Prince ?  
Was not offence like his a complication  
Of insult and of treason ?—and he lives !  
Had he instead of on the Doge's throne  
Stamped the same brand upon a peasant's stool,  
His blood had gilt the threshold ; for the carle  
Had stabbed him on the instant.

The Doge's quarrel is now no longer with Michel Steno, but with the Senate, the State, which by condoning the insult has made his guilt its own. The vengeance which had been directed against an individual is turned now against the State and we have the unexampled

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situation of the head of the republic setting himself to plot the destruction of the State of which he is the head. Just at this moment Faliero is visited by another Venetian, also burning with a sense of wrong. Israel Bertuccio, the chief of the arsenal, and a tried and gallant soldier, has been struck by a noble, and comes to the Doge to claim redress. Faliero shows him how powerless he is to grant his request, for has he not himself suffered the most grievous wrong at the hands of the corrupt Venetian oligarchy? Bertuccio discloses a plot that is on foot to overthrow the State, and Faliero, moved partly by private wrong and partly by a desire to rid the Republic of a degenerate Senate who make even the Doge their servant, agrees to meet the conspirators secretly and by night.

*Doge (solus).* At midnight, by the church Saints  
John and Paul,

Where sleep my noble fathers, I repair—  
To what? to hold a council in the dark  
With common ruffians leagued to ruin states!  
And will not my great sires leap from the vault,  
Where lie two Doges who preceded me,  
And pluck me down amongst them? Would they  
could!

For I should rest in honour with the honoured.  
Alas! I must not think of them, but those  
Who have made me thus unworthy of a name  
Noble and brave as aught of consular  
On Roman marbles; but I will redeem it  
Back to its antique lustre in our annals,  
By sweet revenge on all that's base in Venice,

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And freedom to the rest, or leave it black  
To all the growing calumnies of Time,  
Which never spare the fame of him who fails,  
But try the Cæsar, or the Catiline,  
By the true touchstone of desert—Success.

In striking contrast with Faliero is his young wife, Angiolina. She it was who was struck at by the insult, but conscious of her own integrity, and secure in her love for her lord, she thinks little of it, and urges Faliero to do as she does and despise a deed which does wrong, not to them, but to the doer.

*Doge.* Come hither, child ! I would a word with you.

Your father was my friend ; unequal Fortune  
Made him my debtor for some courtesies  
Which bind the good more firmly : when, oppressed  
With his last malady, he willed our union,  
It was not to repay me, long repaid  
Before by his great loyalty in friendship ;  
His object was to place your orphan beauty  
In honourable safety from the perils,  
Which, in this scorpion nest of vice, assail  
A lonely and undowered maid. I did not  
Think with him, but would not oppose the thought  
Which soothed his death-bed.

*Ang.* I have not forgotten  
The nobleness with which you bade me speak  
If my young heart held any preference  
Which would have made me happier ; nor your offer  
To make my dowry equal to the rank  
Of aught in Venice, and forego all claim  
My father's last injunction gave you.

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*Doge.* I knew my heart would never treat you harshly ;

I knew my days could not disturb you long ;  
And then the daughter of my earliest friend,  
His worthy daughter, free to choose again,  
Wealthier and wiser, in the ripest bloom  
Of womanhood, more skilful to select  
By passing these probationary years,  
Inheriting a Prince's name and riches,  
Secured, by the short penance of enduring  
An old man for some summers, against all  
That law's chicane or envious kinsmen might  
Have urged against her right ; my best friend's child  
Would choose more fitly in respect of years,  
And not less truly in a faithful heart.

*Ang.* My Lord, I looked but to my father's wishes,  
Hallowed by his last words, and to my heart  
For doing all its duties, and replying  
With faith to him with whom I was affianced.  
Ambitious hopes ne'er crossed my dreams ; and should  
The hour you speak of come, it will be seen so.

*Doge.* I do believe you ; and I know you true :  
For Love—romantic Love—which in my youth  
I knew to be illusion, and ne'er saw  
Lasting, but often fatal, it had been  
No lure for me, in my most passionate days,  
And could not be so now, did such exist.  
But such respect, and mildly paid regard  
As a true feeling for your welfare, and  
A free compliance with all honest wishes,—  
A kindness to your virtues, watchfulness  
Not shown, but shadowing o'er such little failings  
As Youth is apt in, so as not to check  
Rashly, but win you from them ere you knew  
You had been won, but thought the change your  
choice ;



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A pride not in your beauty, but your conduct ;  
A trust in you ; a patriarchal love,  
And not a doting homage ; friendship, faith,—  
Such estimation in your eyes as these  
Might claim, I hoped for.

*Ang.* And have ever had.

*Dogc.* I think so. For the difference in our years  
You knew it choosing me, and chose ; I trusted  
Not to my qualities, nor would have faith  
In such, nor outward ornaments of nature,  
Were I still in my five and twentieth spring ;  
I trusted to the blood of Loredano  
Pure in your veins ; I trusted to the soul  
God gave you—to the truths your father taught you—  
To your belief in Heaven—to your mild virtues—  
To your own faith and honour, for my own.

*Ang.* You have done well.—I thank you for that  
trust,  
Which I have never for one moment ceased  
To honour you the more for.

Angiolina's clemency and her devotion serve  
only to make the Doge more resolute in the  
execution of his design, and midnight sees him  
introduced to the company of the conspirators.  
The spirit that animates them is well expressed  
by Israel Bertuccio, who, in reply to the timorous  
“ But if we fail——” of one of the band, replies :

*I. Ber.* They never fail who die  
In a great cause : the block may soak their gore ;  
Their heads may sodden in the sun ; their limbs  
Be strung to city gates and castle walls—  
But still their Spirit walks abroad. Though years

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Elapse, and others share as dark a doom,  
They but augment the deep and sweeping thoughts  
Which overpower all others, and conduct  
The world at last to Freedom. What were we,  
If Brutus had not lived ? He died in giving  
Rome liberty, but left a deathless lesson—  
A name which is a virtue, and a Soul  
Which multiplies itself throughout all time,  
When wicked men wax mighty, and a state  
Turns servile. He and his high friend were styled  
" The last of Romans ! " Let us be the first  
Of true Venetians, sprung from Roman sires.

Faliero makes a dramatic entry into the company of the conspirators. When he throws aside the cloak that covers him and displays himself in his ducal robes there is a shout of " Treachery ! " and all rush to arms, to die with sword in hand. They are speedily informed by Israel Bertuccio that so far from coming to frustrate and punish, the Doge has come to be the leader in their design. The plot is speedily matured. The Doge will give the signal for the ringing of the great bell of Saint Mark's, which he alone has the power to order. When the sound is heard the Patricians are bound to assemble with all speed in the Council Chamber, for the bell never rings save on the occasion of some great and sudden danger. Meanwhile, all avenues of escape shall have been closed up, and armed bands are to fall on the defenceless and unsuspecting senators and cut them down to a man. It is not to be supposed that the Doge takes this step lightly or

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without much searching of heart. He never wavers in his intent, but he is about to seal the destruction of his own order, of the men with whom he had many ties.

All these men were my friends ; I loved them, they  
Requited honourably my regards ;  
We served and fought ; we smiled and wept in  
    concert ;  
We revelled or we sorrowed side by side ;  
We made alliances of blood and marriage ;  
We grew in years and honours fairly,—till  
Their own desire, not my ambition, made  
Them choose me for their Prince, and then farewell !  
Farewell all social memory ! all thoughts  
In common ! and sweet bonds which link old  
    friendships,  
When the survivors of long years and actions,  
Which now belong to history, soothe the days  
Which yet remain by treasuring each other,  
And never meet, but each beholds the mirror  
Of half a century on his brother's brow,  
And sees a hundred beings, now in earth  
Flit round them whispering of the days gone by,  
And seeming not all dead, as long as two  
Of the brave, joyous, reckless, glorious band,  
Which once were one and many. still retain  
A breath to sigh for them, a tongue to speak  
Of deeds that else were silent, save on marble——  
*Oimé ! Oimé !*—and must I do this deed ?

Act III closes with a series of eloquent lamentations on the necessity of the deed, and of equally eloquent declarations of his determination to proceed with it.

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The plot is a perfect one—unless, indeed, there is a traitor or a coward in the band. The one weak spot in it is the conspirator Bertram. Early in the evening he asked, “Must all perish in this slaughter?” He is bound by ties of old affection and gratitude to one of the Senate, Lioni, and in the early hours of the morning goes to his palace to warn him not to answer to the summons which he will hear before morning breaks. Lioni presses him with questions, and an unfortunate mention by Bertram of the Doge throws a flood of light on the whole scheme. The Council of Ten is called and when morning breaks and the alarum bell rings it is not the senators who are surprised but the Doge and the conspirators.

Act V is occupied with the trial of the Doge, the parting interview between him and his wife, and his decapitation.

It will be observed that the unity of place is carefully adhered to, for all the action takes place within Venice; that the action is comprised within the space of twenty-four hours, for Faliero hears one day of the decision of the Forty in the case of Michel Steno, and the next he is beheaded for his crime; and that the play is a complete unity, all the threads of action leading up to and down from the conspiracy, which is consummated in the middle act of the five. The play makes by no means dull reading. The plot and incidents are clearer than they are in most of the narrative poems; the characters are better defined. But it is as a

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narrative that we read it, for the long speeches, eloquent and highly poetical as they often are, make it drag when presented on the stage.

"Cain" is a drama apart and different from the other plays of Byron. In it he treats the Bible story of the fall, that is, the entry of evil into the world, with its dreadful fruit, the murder of Abel by Cain. The play deals with such problems as the origin of evil, the mystery of death, the punishment for sin—all subjects which have perplexed the mind of man ever since he began to think. Byron calls his play a "mystery," partly because, like the old mystery plays, it deals with a Biblical subject; and partly, perhaps, because it deals with problems beyond the reach of human power to solve. There are many beautiful scenes in the play; Adah, Cain's sister, is a type of sweet and loving womanhood; and the last scene of all is one of the most moving pathos.

The play is one of Byron's most serious works. In many others the tone is one of mockery and bitter jest, but not here. Byron treats a lofty subject in a lofty manner, and although his position is entirely heterodox his conclusions are honest and deeply pondered. The play is one for mature readers, who have thought over the subjects it deals with and have come to reasoned conclusions regarding them.

The dedication of the drama is to Sir Walter Scott. In writing to accept the honour Scott writes of "the very grand and tremendous drama of Cain," and says that the author "has

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certainly matched Milton on his own ground." Scott has been censured as uncritical and partial ; but a careful consideration of the play will lead one more and more to agree with him. Its publication caused a violent outcry. It was preached against " from Kentish Town to Pisa." John Murray was denounced for having given his respectable name to the title-page of so inflammatory a publication. When an application was made to the courts to prevent its being pirated, Lord Eldon, the Chancellor, refused it the protection of the law. But, notwithstanding all the outcry, it was representative of Byron in his better mood : not the Byron of Venice and " Beppo," but the Byron of Ravenna, who has come under the spell of a great cause and of a genius greater and more daring than his own.

! We have seen that Byron began his literary career with satire, and that the satiric spirit was never long dormant in his subsequent work. It is to this period that his greatest satiric work belongs, " The Vision of Judgment," and with it is connected the story of one of the most famous of literary quarrels. Southey had in his youthful days, like his friends Wordsworth and Coleridge, been advanced, and even revolutionary, in his opinions. In those early days he had written a drama which had for its hero the arch-rebel of Richard II's days—Wat Tyler. He was then what Byron was throughout his life—a rebel against convention and oppression and wickedness in high places. But Southey's opinions underwent a complete change and he

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not only became identified in Byron's eyes with what was servile and base, but was execrated as a renegade from the cause of freedom and progress. When in 1821 Southey published his funeral ode on the death of George III it was immediately parodied in Byron's poem of the same name. The title-page contains a shrewd hit. It runs, "The Vision of Judgment, by Quevedo Redivivus, suggested by the composition so entitled by the author of 'Wat Tyler,'" a reference to the days when Southey, the out-and-out defender of Church and State, the holder of a State pension, poet-laureate, had been as revolutionary as the rest of them. The quarrel had its personal as well as its general ground, and the question who began it is not of very much interest. But it has its importance in literary history since its outcome, among other things, was this satire, as bitter and vehement as anything that came even from the hand of Swift.

To this period belongs Byron's first experiments in *ottava rima*, the measure which he presently used so effectively in "Don Juan." It is admirably suited for its purpose, where the verse is facile and flowing, running on from thought to thought without much depth, but with a brilliancy and a sparkle that make it most alluring. The eight-lined stanza lends itself admirably to narrative, for it is long enough to admit of a topic being developed, while the end of the stanza gives the opportunity, if the poet wishes it, of finishing with some witty, pointed

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saying. It is the true medium for less serious satiric poetry—light, easy, flowing, free. As an example we may take the following stanzas from “ Beppo ” :

### ITALY AND ENGLAND

#### XLI

With all its sinful doings, I must say,  
That Italy's a pleasant place to me,  
Who love to see the Sun shine every day,  
And vines (not nailed to walls) from tree to tree  
Festooned, much like the back scene of a play,  
Or melodrame, which people flock to see  
When the first act is ended by a dance  
In vineyards copied from the south of France.

#### XLII

I like on Autumn evenings to ride out,  
Without being forced to bid my groom be sure  
My cloak is round his middle strapped about,  
Because the skies are not the most secure ;  
I know too that, if stopped upon my route,  
Where the green alleys windingly allure,  
Reeling with *grapes* red wagons choke the way,—  
In England 'twould be dung, dust, or a dray.

#### XLIII

I also like to dine on becaficas,  
To see the Sun set sure he'll rise to-morrow,  
Not through a misty morning twinkling weak as  
A drunken man's dead eye in maudlin sorrow,  
But with all Heaven t'himself ; the day will break as  
Beauteous as cloudless, nor be forced to borrow  
That sort of farthing candlelight which glimmers  
Where reeking London's smoky cauldron simmers.



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## XLIV

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,  
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,  
And sounds as if it should be writ on satin,  
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South,  
And gentle liquids gliding all so pat in,  
That not a single accent seems uncouth,  
Like our harsh northern whistling, grunting, guttural  
Which we're obliged to hiss, and spit, and sputter all.

## XLV

I like the women too (forgive my folly !),  
From the rich peasant cheek of ruddy bronze,  
And large black eyes that flash on you a volley  
Of rays that say a thousand things at once,  
To the high Dama's brow, more melancholy,  
But clear, and with a wild and liquid glance,  
Heart on her lips, and soul within her eyes  
Soft as her clime, and sunny as her skies.

## XLVI .

Eve of the land which still is Paradise !  
Italian Beauty didst thou not inspire  
Raphael, who died in thy embrace, and vies  
With all we know of Heaven, or can desire,  
In what he hath bequeathed us ?—in what guise  
Though flashing from the fervour of the Lyre,  
Would *words* describe thy past and present glow,  
While yet Canova can create below ?

## XLVII

“England ! with all thy faults I love thee still,”  
I said at Calais, and have not forgot it ;  
I like to speak and lucubrate my fill ;  
I like the government (but that is not it) ;

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I like the freedom of the press and quill ;  
I like the Habeas Corpus (when we've got it)  
I like a Parliamentary debate,  
Particularly when 'tis not too late ;

## XLVIII

I like the taxes, when they're not too many ;  
I like a seacoal fire, when not too dear ;  
I like a beef-steak, too, as well as any ;  
Have no objection to a pot of beer ;  
I like the weather,—when it is not rainy  
That is, I like two months of every year.  
And so God save the Regent, Church, and King !  
Which means that I like all and every thing.

## XLIX

Our standing army, and disbanded seamen,  
Poor's rate, Reform, my own, the nation's debt,  
Our little riots, just to show we're free men,  
Our trifling bankruptcies in the Gazette,  
Our cloudy climate, and our chilly women,  
All these I can forgive, and those forget,  
And greatly venerate our recent glories,  
And wish they were not owing to the Tories.

## VIII

THE last six years of Byron's life were crowded both with events and with work. Narrative poetry, satire, historical drama, occasional verse, letters—almost five hundred belonging to these years are printed in Murray's edition of Byron's "Letters and Journals"—poured from his pen. He gave

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much attention to the conduct of family business at home ; he was in constant correspondence with Murray about the publication of his works ; and he gave himself whole-heartedly to the dangerous and exacting work of directing a revolution, first in Italy and afterwards in Greece. And as if this were not enough, he was engaged all the time in writing " Don Juan," his longest, most characteristic, and, as many think, his greatest poem. It was begun at Venice in September 1816, published at intervals till the year 1823, and when his room was searched for papers after his death in 1824, fourteen stanzas of a seventeenth canto were discovered, and published so lately as 1903. Even then, notwithstanding its portentous length, it shows no sign of coming to an end. It is doubtful if it would ever have come to an end, in the sense of being completed. It would simply have ceased to continue as the practical affairs of a great cause absorbed the poet's energies, and gave him the opportunity of doing deeds worthy of being celebrated in verse, instead of simply writing about them.

The poem is a curious medley, as full of startling contrasts and incongruities as Byron's life itself is—of which, indeed, it is to some extent a transcript. It is flippant as well as serious. It contains passages of exalted poetic beauty alongside of passages where the thought is commonplace and the language colloquial or vulgar. Verses written in a serious mood of denunciation or praise are succeeded by verses

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in which the poet laughs at himself for having seemed to take himself so seriously. It has the variety of life itself, and has therefore all the interest that a frank unrestrained narrative of Byron's thoughts, feelings and moods would be sure to have. But like "Cain" it is not a book for young readers, nor indeed is it one that would be likely to interest them.

There is little or no story in the poem. A hero is provided, chiefly that there may be some one round whom the various incidents may cluster, but Byron repeatedly leaves what action there is at a standstill and digresses to give his own opinion on the matter in hand. There are vivid descriptions of storm and shipwreck, of a slave-market, of the storming of a town; and in the eleventh canto the hero is brought to London, and furnishes Byron with an opportunity of describing in a keenly satirical style life in London, and, later, life at an English country house. The house, called in the poem Norman Abbey, is Newstead, in which Byron still cherished a deep interest, although he had been obliged to sell it in 1817. The last four cantos deal with life at Newstead, and following stanzas give a very accurate description of the Abbey and its immediate surroundings.

### LV

To Norman Abbey whirled the noble pair,—  
An old, old Monastery once, and now  
Still older mansion—of a rich and rare  
Mixed Gothic, such as artists all allow

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Few specimens yet left us can compare

Withal : it lies, perhaps, a little low,  
Because the monks preferred a hill behind,  
To shelter their devotion from the wind.

## LVI

It stood embosomed in a happy valley,  
Crowned by high woodlands, where the Druid oak  
Stood like Caractacus, in act to rally  
His host, with broad arms 'gainst the thunder-  
stroke ;  
And from beneath his boughs were seen to sally  
The dappled foresters ; as Day awoke,  
The branching stag swept down with all his herd,  
To quaff a brook which murmured like a bird.

## LVII

Before the mansion lay a lucid Lake,  
Broad as transparent, deep, and freshly fed  
By a river, which its softened way did take  
In currents through the calmer water spread  
Around : the wildfowl nestled in the brake  
And sedges, brooding in their liquid bed :  
The woods sloped downwards to its brink, and stood  
With their green faces fixed upon the flood.

## LVIII

Its outlet dashed into a deep cascade,  
Sparkling with foam, until again subsiding,  
Its shriller echoes—like an infant made  
Quiet—sank into softer ripples, gliding  
Into a rivulet ; and thus allayed,  
Pursued its course, now gleaming, and now hiding  
Its windings through the woods ; now clear, now blue,  
According as the skies their shadows threw.

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## LIX

A glorious remnant of the Gothic pile  
    (While yet the Church was Rome's) stood half apart  
In a grand Arch, which once screened many an aisle.  
    These last had disappeared—a loss to Art :  
The first yet frowned superbly o'er the soil,  
    And kindled feelings in the roughest heart,  
Which mourned the power of Time's or Tempest's  
    march,  
In gazing on that venerable Arch.

## LX

Within a niche, nigh to its pinnacle,  
    Twelve Saints had once stood sanctified in stone ;  
But these had fallen, not when the friars fell,  
    But in the war which struck Charles from his  
    throne,  
When each house was a fortalice—as tell  
    The annals of full many a line undone,—  
The gallant Cavaliers, who fought in vain  
For those who knew not to resign or reign.

## LXI

But in a higher niche, alone, but crowned,  
    The Virgin-Mother of the God-born Child,  
With her Son in her blessed arms, looked round,  
    Spared by some chance when all beside was spoiled  
She made the earth below seem holy ground.  
    This may be superstition, weak or wild ;  
But even the faintest relics of a shrine  
Of any worship wake some thoughts divine.

## LXII

A mighty window, hollow in the centre,  
    Shorn of its glass of thousand colourings,

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Through which the deepened glories once could enter,  
Streaming from off the Sun like Seraph's wings,  
Now yawns all desolate : now loud, now fainter,  
The gale sweeps through its fretwork, and oft sings  
The owl his anthem. where the silenced quire  
Lie with their Hallelujahs quenched like fire.

## LXIII

But in the noontide of the moon, and when  
The wind is wingéd from one point of heaven,  
There moans a strange unearthly sound, which then  
Is musical—a dying accent driven  
Through the huge Arch, which soars and sinks again  
Some deem it but the distant echo given  
Back to the night wind by the waterfall,  
And harmonized by the old choral wall :

## LXIV

Others, that some original shape, or form  
Shaped by decay perchance, hath given the power  
(Though less than that of Memnon's statue, warm  
In Egypt's rays, to harp at a fixed hour)  
To this grey ruin : with a voice to charm,  
Sad, but serene, it sweeps o'er tree or tower ;  
The cause I know not, nor can solve ; but such  
The fact :—I've heard it,—once perhaps too much.

## LXV

Amidst the court a Gothic fountain played,  
Symmetrical, but decked with carvings quaint—  
Strange faces, like to men in masquerade,  
And here perhaps a monster, there a saint :  
The spring gushed through grim mouths of granite  
made,  
And sparkled into basins, where it spent

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Its little torrent in a thousand bubbles,  
Like man's vain glory, and his vainer troubles.

### LXVI

The Mansion's self was vast and venerable,  
With more of the monastic than has been  
Elsewhere preserved : the cloisters still were  
stable,

The cells, too, and Refectory, I ween :  
An exquisite small chapel had been able,  
Still unimpaired, to decorate the scene ;  
The rest had been reformed, replaced, or sunk,  
And spoke more of the baron than the monk.

### LXVII

Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers,  
joined

By no quite lawful marriage of the arts,  
Might shock a connoisseur ; but when combined,  
Formed a whole which, irregular in parts,  
Yet left a grand impression on the mind,  
At least of those whose eyes are in their hearts :  
We gaze upon a giant for his stature,  
Nor judge at first if all be true to nature.

### LXVIII

Steel Barons, molten the next generation  
To silken rows of gay and gartered Earls,  
Glanced from the walls in goodly preservation :  
And Lady Marys blooming into girls,  
With fair long locks, had also kept their station :  
And Countesses mature in robes and pearls :  
Also some beauties of Sir Peter Lely,  
Whose drapery hints we may admire them freely.



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## LXIX

Judges in very formidable ermine

Were there, with brows that did not much invite  
The accused to think their lordships would deter-  
mine

His cause by leaning much from might to right :  
Bishops, who had not left a single sermon ;

Attorneys-general, awful to the sight,  
As hinting more (unless our judgments warp us)  
Of the " Star Chamber " than of " Habeas Corpus."

## LXX

Generals, some all in armour, of the old

And iron time, ere lead had ta'en the lead ;  
Others in wigs of Marlborough's martial fold,

Huger than twelve of our degenerate breed :  
Lordlings, with staves of white or keys of gold :

Nimrods, whose canvas scarce contained the steed ;  
And, here and there, some stern high patriot stood,  
Who could not get the place for which he sued.

## LXXI

But ever and anon, to soothe your vision,

Fatigued with these hereditary glories,  
There rose a Carlo Dolce or a Titian,

Or wilder group of savage Salvatore's :  
Here danced Albano's boys, and here the sea shone  
In Vernet's ocean lights ; and there the stories  
Of martyrs awed, as Spagnoletto tainted  
His brush with all the blood of all the sainted.

## LXXII

Here sweetly spread a landscape of Lorraine ;

There Rembrandt made his darkness equal light,

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Or gloomy Caravaggio's gloomier stain

Bronzed o'er some lean and stoic anchorite :—

But, lo ! a Teniers woos, and not in vain,

Your eyes to revel in a livelier sight :

His bell-mouthed goblet makes me feel quite Danish

Or Dutch with thirst—What, ho ! a flask of Rhenish.

An example of Byron's changefulness of mood is found in the third canto. The scene is the island of Lambro, the Corsair. Haidée, his daughter, and Juan, in the continued absence of the chief, and believing at last that he is dead, make free use of all the pirate's wealth, and are holding high revel when he, unknown to them, returns, and gazes with wondering eyes on the scenes of unwonted revelry. The feast is over, and the poet of the pirate's island sings the lofty strain which was at this time undoubtedly the expression of Byron's deepest and truest thoughts—"The Isles of Greece." Then he laughs at himself and at poetic glory in general, and so is led to discuss contemporary aspirants to poetic fame. This he does in verses which are amusing though often abusive. Thereafter follow the beautiful verses on Evening. And all this while Lambro is waiting to break in on the unsuspecting pair !

### I

The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece !

Where burning Sappho loved and sung,

Where grew the arts of War and Peace,

Where Delos rose and Phœbus sprung !

Eternal summer gilds them yet,

But all, except their Sun, is set.

## 2

The Scian and the Teian muse,  
 The Hero's harp, the Lover's lute,  
 Have found the fame your shores refuse :  
 Their place of birth alone is mute  
 To sounds which echo further west  
 Than your Sires' " Islands of the Blest."

## 3

The mountains look on Marathon—  
 And Marathon looks on the sea ;  
 And musing there an hour alone,  
 I dreamed that Greece might still be free  
 For standing on the Persians' grave  
 I could not deem myself a slave.

## 4

A King sate on the rocky brow  
 Which looks o'er sea-born Salamis ;  
 And ships, by thousands, lay below,  
 And men in nations ;—all were his !  
 He counted them at break of day—  
 And, when the Sun set, where were they ?

## 5

And where are they ? and where art thou,  
 My country ? On thy voiceless shore  
 The heroic lay is tuneless now—  
 The heroic bosom beats no more !  
 And must thy Lyre, so long divine,  
 Degenerate into hands like mine ?

## 6

'Tis something, in the dearth of Fame,  
 Though linked among a fettered race,

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To feel at least a patriot's shame,  
Even as I sing, suffuse my face ;  
For what is left the poet here ?  
For Greeks a blush—for Greece a tear.

### 7

Must *we* but weep o'er days more blest ?  
Must *we* but blush ?—Our fathers bled.  
Earth ! render back from out thy breast  
A remnant of our Spartan dead !  
Of the three hundred grant but three,  
To make a new Thermopylæ !

### 8

What, silent still ? and silent all ?  
Ah ! no ;—the voices of the dead  
Sound like a distant torrent's fall,  
And answer, " Let one living head,  
But one arise,—we come, we come ! "  
'Tis but the living who are dumb.

### 9

In vain—in vain : strike other chords ;  
Fill high the cup with Samian wine !  
Leave battles to the Turkish hordes,  
And shed the blood of Scio's vine !  
Hark ! rising to the ignoble call—  
How answers each bold Bacchanal !

### 10

You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet,  
Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone ?  
Of two such lessons, why forget  
The noblier and the manlier one ?  
You have the letters Cadmus gave—  
Think ye he meant them for a slave ?

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## 11

Fill high the bowl with Samian wine !  
We will not think of themes like these  
It made Anacreon's song divine :  
He served—but served Polycrates—  
A Tyrant ; but our masters then  
Were still, at least, our countrymen.

## 12

The Tyrant of the Chersonese  
Was Freedom's best and bravest friend .  
*That* tyrant was Miltiades !  
Oh ! that the present hour would lend  
Another despot of the kind !  
Such chains as his were sure to bind.

## 13

Fill high the bowl with Samian wine !  
On Suli's rock, and Parga's shore,  
Exists the remnant of a line  
Such as the Doric mothers bore ;  
And there, perhaps, some seed is sown  
The Heracleidan blood might own.

## 14

Trust not for freedom to the Franks—  
They have a king who buys and sells ;  
In native swords, and native ranks,  
The only hope of courage dwells ;  
But Turkish force, and Latin fraud,  
Would break your shield, however broad.

## 15

Fill high the bowl with Samian wine !  
Our virgins dance beneath the shade—

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I see their glorious black eyes shine ;  
But gazing on each glowing maid,  
My own the burning tear-drop laves,  
To think such breasts must suckle slaves.

### 16

Place me on Sunium's marbled steep,  
Where nothing, save the waves and I,  
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep ;  
There, swan-like, let me sing and die :  
A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine—  
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine !

### LXXXVII

*Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung,*  
The modern Greek, in tolerable verse ;  
If not like Orpheus quite, when Greece was young,  
Yet in these times he might have done much worse ;  
His strain displayed some feeling—right or wrong ;  
And feeling, in a poet, is the source  
Of others' feeling ; but they are such liars,  
And take all colours—like the hands of dyers.

### LXXXVIII

But words are things, and a small drop of ink,  
Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces  
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think ;  
'Tis strange, the shortest letter which man uses  
Instead of speech, may form a lasting link  
Of ages ; to what straits old Time reduces  
Frail man, when paper—even a rag like this,  
Survives himself, his tomb, and all that's his !

### LXXXIX

And when his bones are dust, his grave a blank,  
His station, generation, even his nation,

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Become a thing, or nothing, save to rank  
In chronological commemoration,  
Some dull MS. Oblivion long has sank,  
Or graven stone found in a barrack's station  
In digging the foundation of a closet,  
May turn his name up, as a rare deposit.

## XC

And Glory long has made the sages smile ;  
'Tis something, nothing, words, illusion, wind—  
Depending more upon the historian's style  
Than on the name a person leaves behind :  
Troy owes to Homer what whist owes to Hoyle :  
The present century was growing blind  
To the great Marlborough's skill in giving knocks,  
Until his late Life by Archdeacon Coxe.

## XCI

Milton's the Prince of poets—so we say ;  
A little heavy, but no less divine :  
An independent being in his day—  
Learned, pious, temperate in love and wine ;  
But, his life falling into Johnson's way,  
We're told this great High Priest of all the Nine  
Was whipped at college—a harsh sire—odd spouse  
For the first Mrs. Milton left his house.

## XCII

All these are, *certainly*, entertaining facts,  
Like Shakespeare's stealing deer, Lord Bacon's bribes ;  
Like Titus' youth, and Cæsar's earliest acts ;  
Like Burns (whom Doctor Currie well describes) ;  
Like Cromwell's pranks ;—but although Truth exacts  
These amiable descriptions from the scribes,  
As most essential to their hero's story,  
They do not much contribute to his glory.

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## XCIII

All are not moralists, like Southey, when  
He prated to the world of "Pantisocracy" ;  
Or Wordsworth unexcised, unhired, who then  
Seasoned his pedlar poems with Democracy ;  
Or Coleridge long before his flighty pen  
Let to the Morning Post its aristocracy ;  
When he and Southey, following the same path,  
Espoused two partners (milliners of Bath).

## XCIV

Such names at present cut a convict figure,  
The very Botany Bay in moral geography ;  
Their loyal treason, renegado rigour,  
Are good manure for their more bare biography ;  
Wordsworth's last quarto, by the way, is bigger  
Than any since the birthday of typography ;  
A drowsy, frowzy poem, called the "Excursion,"  
Writ in a manner which is my aversion.

## XCV

He there builds up a formidable dyke  
Between his own and others' intellect ;  
But Wordsworth's poem, and his followers, like  
Joanna Southcote's Shiloh and her sect,  
Are things which in this century don't strike  
The public mind,—so few are the elect ;  
And the new births of both their stale Virginities  
Have proved but Dropsies, taken for Divinities.

## XCVI

But let me to my story : I must own,  
If I have any fault, it is digression,  
Leaving my people to proceed alone,  
While I soliloquise beyond expression ;



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But these are my addresses from the throne,  
Which put off business to the ensuing session :—  
Forgetting each omission is a loss to  
The world, not quite so great as Ariosto.

## XCVII

I know that what our neighbours call "*longueurs*,"  
(We've not so good a *word*, but have the *thing*,  
In that complete perfection which insures  
An epic from Bob Southey every spring—)  
Form not the true temptation which allures  
The reader ; but 'twould not be hard to bring  
Some fine examples of the *Epopée*,  
To prove its grand ingredient is *Ennui*.

## XCVIII

We learn from Horace, "Homer sometimes sleeps ;"  
We feel without him,—Wordsworth sometimes  
wakes,—  
To show with what complacency he creeps,  
With his dear "*Waggoners*," around his lakes.  
He wishes for "a boat" to sail the deeps—  
Of Ocean ?—No, of air ; and then he makes  
Another outcry for "a little boat,"  
And drivels seas to set it well afloat.

## XCIX

If he must fain sweep o'er the ethereal plain,  
And Pegasus runs restive in his "*Waggon*,"  
Could he not beg the loan of Charles's Wain ?  
Or pray Medea for a single dragon ?  
Or if, too classic for his vulgar brain,  
He feared his neck to venture such a nag on,  
And he must needs mount nearer to the moon,  
Could not the blockhead ask for a balloon ?

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## C

"Pedlars," and "Boats," and "Waggon's !" Oh !  
ye shades

Of Pope and Dryden, are we come to this ?  
That trash of such sort not alone evades  
Contempt, but from the bathos' vast abyss  
Floats scumlike uppermost, and these Jack Cades  
Of sense and song above your graves may hiss—  
The "little boatman" and his *Peter Bell*  
Can sneer at him who drew "Achitophel" !

## CI

T' our tale.—The feast was over, the slaves gone,  
The dwarfs and dancing girls had all retired ;  
The Arab lore and Poet's song were done,  
And every sound of revelry expired ;  
The lady and her lover, left alone,  
The rosy flood of Twilight's sky admired ;—  
Ave Maria ! o'er the earth and sea,  
That heavenliest hour of Heaven is worthiest thee !

## CII

Ave Maria ! blesséd be the hour !  
The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft  
Have felt that moment in its fullest power  
Sink o'er the earth—so beautiful and soft—  
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,  
Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,  
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,  
And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer.

## CIII

Ave Maria ! 'tis the hour of prayer !  
Ave Maria ! 'tis the hour of Love !  
Ave Maria ! may our spirits dare  
Look up to thine and to thy Son's above !

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Ave Maria ! oh that face so fair !

Those downcast eyes beneath the Almighty Dove—  
What though 'tis but a pictured image ?—strike—  
That painting is no idol,—'tis too like.

## CIV

Some kinder casuists are pleased to say,

In nameless print—that I have no devotion ;  
But set those persons down with me to pray,  
And you shall see who has the properest notion  
Of getting into Heaven the shortest way ;

My altars are the mountains and the Ocean,  
Earth—air—stars,—all that springs from the great  
Whole,

Who hath produced, and will receive the Soul.

## CV

Sweet Hour of Twilight !—in the solitude

Of the pine forest, and the silent shore  
Which bounds Ravenna's immemorial wood,  
Rooted where once the Adrian wave flowed o'er  
To where the last Cæsarean fortress stood,  
Evergreen forest ! which Boccaccio's lore  
And Dryden's lay made haunted ground to me,  
How have I loved the twilight hour and thee !

## CVI

The shrill cicalas, people of the pine,

Making their summer lives one ceaseless song,  
Were the sole echoes, save my steed's and mine,  
And Vesper bells that rose the boughs along ;  
The spectre huntsman of Onesti's line,

His hell-dogs, and their chase, and the fair throng  
Which learned from this example not to fly  
From a true lover,—shadowed my mind's eye.

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## CVII

Oh, Hesperus ! thou bringest all good things—  
Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer  
To the young bird the parent's brooding wings ;  
The welcome stall to the o'erlaboured steer ;  
Whate'er of peace about our hearthstone clings,  
Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,  
Are gathered round us by thy look of rest ;  
Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast.

## CVIII

Soft Hour ! which wakes the wish and melts the heart  
Of those who sail the seas, on the first day  
When they from their sweet friends are torn apart ;  
Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way  
As the far bell of Vesper makes him start,  
Seeming to weep the dying day's decay ;  
Is this a fancy which our reason scorns ?  
Ah ! surely Nothing dies but Something mourns !

Few passages in Byron afford a better example of energetic narrative than Canto II with its description of storm and shipwreck ; or than Cantos VII and VIII with their account of the taking of the town of Ismail. And so, with jest and gibe alongside of fine description and heroic sentiment, the poem goes on, affording in the writing of it, doubtless, a welcome outlet for the poet's feeling.

We have seen that Byron had given himself with a whole heart to the cause of Italian independence. He had been ready to fight for it, he had spent his means freely in the cause, and, in " The Prophecy of Dante," he had pointed

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the way of unity as the only way to Italian freedom. On the failure of the Carbonari rising he turned his eyes to Greece, which was suffering under a bondage more galling than that of Italy, inasmuch as the oppressors there were the Turks, and the contest represented therefore a struggle between Christianity and Islam.

The struggle between Greeks and Turks was rousing much interest in Western Europe, especially in Britain, the traditional home of political freedom, and in France, where a strong body of the people had not acquiesced in the restoration of despotism after the Battle of Waterloo. It was in Edinburgh that the movement in favour of the Greeks first took form in this country. In that city on August 21, 1822, a meeting was held on behalf of the Greeks, and £500 subscribed. In January 1823 Andreas Luriettis was sent to England to further the cause of Greek independence, and the famous Greek Committee was constituted. It numbered among its members such well-known friends of freedom as Joseph Hume, Jeremy Bentham, Sir James Mackintosh and Byron's closest friend and the travel-companion of his earlier years, John Cam Hobhouse.

On July 7 Byron writes : " If I remain in Greece, which will depend mainly upon the presumed probable utility of my presence there, and on the opinion of the Greeks themselves as to its propriety—in short, if I am welcome to them, I shall continue, during my residence at least, to apply such portions of my income,

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present and future, as may forward the object—that is to say, what I can spare for that purpose. Privations I can, or at least could once, bear—abstinence I am accustomed to—and as to fatigue, I was once a tolerable traveller. What I may be now I cannot tell—but I will try.”

Byron's purpose, to be changed or modified as circumstances should demand, was to raise, equip and lead a contingent of Suliotes, the bravest of the Greek soldiers, one of whom “is allowed to be equal to five European Moslems, and ten Asiatics.” He writes in his Journal: “I could keep on foot a respectable clan, or sept, or tribe, or horde, for some time, and as I have not any motive for so doing but the well-wishing to Greece, I should hope, with advantage.”

It will be seen that Byron was willing to give not only himself but his means in the cause of Greece. The ancestral manor of Rochdale, about which a law suit had long been pending, brought much less than the sum expected, but Byron undoubtedly provided very large sums. At one period (February) Parry, the Master-General of the Ordnance sent out by the Committee, and Byron's treasurer at this time, estimates that Byron was spending not less than two thousand dollars per week in rations alone. But no private purse, however long, can support the drain of a protracted war, and Byron gave his strong support to the raising of a Greek loan in London. This was successfully done in February 1824, and Byron was

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appointed one of the three Commissioners for its administration.

Byron, having disposed of his yacht and other effects, sailed from Genoa in the "Hercules," taking with him Gamba, Dr. Bruno, five or six servants, Trelawny and his negro servant, and five or six horses. On August 4 they anchored off Argostoli, in the chief harbour of the island of Cephalonia, an island off the west coast of Greece. Here Byron remained till January 1824, not, as has been suggested, in idleness and indifference but in reality keeping a most anxious watch over the progress of affairs on the mainland.

A few dates will help us to understand exactly at what point Byron's activities intervened in the struggle for Greek independence. The revolution began in April 1821, and ended in February 1830, when Otho, second son of the King of Bavaria, landed to take the throne of an emancipated Greece. The first two years of the struggle were years of brilliant success; the next two, 1823-1824, were years of division, discord, and even civil war among the Greek leaders. In 1825 the Turks called in the help of the Egyptian troops and the fortunes of Greece sank to their nadir. In 1827 there was fought the battle of Navarino, and the success of the emancipation movement was assured.

It was during the second of these periods, that of discord among the leaders, that Byron landed in Cephalonia. He saw quite clearly that if he went to the mainland then he would be claimed

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as an ally and supporter of one or another of the warring sects of Greek patriots. There was a constitution, and a legislative assembly whose president was Mavrocordatos, but there were in Morea, in Western Greece and in Eastern Greece governments which did not recognize the authority of the central government. Byron's object was to strengthen, as far as he could, the national party, but, until he could do so effectively, he preserved his attitude of masterly inactivity in Cephalonia. If Byron could not, as yet, intervene actively in Greek affairs, he sent sound advice to the insurgents, advice which it is not praising too highly to call statesmanlike. On November 30, 1823, he wrote to the General Government of Greece :

The affair of the loan, the expectations so long and so vainly indulged of the arrival of the Greek fleet, and the danger to which Mesolonghi is still exposed, have detained me here, and will still detain me till some of them are removed. But when the money shall be advanced for the fleet I will start for the Morea ; not knowing, however, of what use my presence can be in the present state of things. We have heard rumours of new dissensions, nay, of the existence of a civil war. With all my heart I pray that these reports may be false or exaggerated, for I can imagine no calamity more serious than this ; and I must frankly confess that unless union and order are established all hopes of a loan will be vain ; and all the assistance which the Greeks could expect from abroad—and assistance neither trifling nor worthless—will be suspended or destroyed ; and, what is worse, the great powers of



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Europe, of whom no one was an enemy to Greece, but seemed to favour her establishment of an independent power, will be persuaded that the Greeks are unable to govern themselves, and will, perhaps, themselves undertake to settle your disorders in such a way as to blast the brightest hopes of yourselves and of your friends.

Allow me to add, once for all—I desire the well-being of Greece, and nothing else ; I will do all I can to secure it ; but I cannot consent, I never will consent, that the English public or English individuals, should be deceived as to the real state of Greek affairs. The rest, gentlemen, depends on you. You have fought gloriously ;—act honourably towards your fellow-citizens and the world, and it will then no more be said, as has been repeated for two thousand years with the Roman historians, that Philopœmon was the last of the Grecians. Let not calumny itself (and it is difficult, I own, to guard against it in so arduous a struggle) compare the patriot Greek, when resting from his labours, to the Turkish pacha, whom his victories have exterminated.

The wise and spirited advice and remonstrances which this paper contained were repeated more explicitly in a letter to Mavrocordatos. It is distressing to think that Byron did not live to see the result of his appeal, for it was not till eight months after his death that a strong central government was formed.

Byron was under no illusion regarding the character of the people he had gone to succour. "Whoever goes into Greece at present should do it as Mrs. Fry went into Newgate," he wrote, "not in the expectation of meeting with any especial examples of existing probity, but in the

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hope that time and better treatment will reclaim the present burglarious and larcenous tendencies which have followed this general gaol delivery." "They are such liars," he continues. "One of them found fault the other day with the English language, because it had so few shades of a Negative, whereas a Greek can so modify a 'No' to a 'Yes,' and vice versa, by the slippery qualities of his language, that prevarication may be carried to any extent and still leave a loophole through which perjury may slip without being perceived." We have seen what Byron thought of their internal dissensions and their incapacity for united action. But nothing else could be expected. They were bondsmen, and had been sons of bondsmen for five centuries back. But give them only freedom, and freedom won by and not for them, and Byron felt sure that a great future awaited the country which had so great a past. He did much to reconcile the jarring sects among the patriots; and on the Greek Committee his was the sanest voice. Some of its members were much influenced by Bentham, and thought that the printing press, tracts, political and other, schools, books and newspapers would work a reformation, forgetting that freedom must be achieved before these could come into play. Colonel Stanhope, afterwards Lord Harrington, was the chief representative of these views in Greece. "The typographical colonel," as Byron contemptuously called him, "was in favour of writing the Turks down; I was in favour of

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fighting them down." But Stanhope, like Byron, was in earnest and the two were good friends during the time they lived together—the last four months of Byron's life, and it was he who in June 1824 brought Byron's body home to England.

In response to an urgent call from Mavrocordatos Byron sailed from Cephalonia on December 29 and reached Mesolonghi on January 5, 1824. "He was welcomed with salvos of artillery, firing of muskets, and wild music. Crowds of soldiery and citizens of every age, rank and sex were assembled on the shore to testify their delight. Hope and content were pictured in every countenance. His lordship landed in a Speziot boat dressed in a red uniform. He was in excellent health, and appeared moved by the scene. I met him as he disembarked, and in a few minutes we entered the house prepared for him—the same in which Colonel Stanhope resided. The Colonel and Prince Mavrocordatos, with a long suite of European and Greek officers received him at the door." Such is the account given by Gamba, who had landed at Mesolonghi the day before. Several other accounts of the scene may be read and all agree in describing the popular enthusiasm and acclamation with which Byron was received. Whether or not Byron cherished a hope of being elected to the vacant throne we cannot tell. It is certain that, if he did, such a hope was not extravagant.

The last four months of Byron's life, those spent at Mesolonghi, were a time of disillusion

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and disappointment. The Suliotes, whom he had hoped to organize and equip, were dismissed as hopeless. He had been commissioned on January 25 to attack Lepanto, and as it was Byron's first opportunity of service in the field he looked forward to it with eager expectancy. But the Suliotes would not move. "They would not fight stone walls," they said. Besides, they quarrelled and fought among themselves and with the other nationalities which made up the motley European corps of the Greek army. Nothing was attempted, because the first step to action—unity—had not been taken. In March, however, Byron and Mavrocordatos succeeded in arranging a conference with Odysseus, who was in command in Eastern Greece. All the time he was fighting against odds with admirable spirit and patience. Drill, sword exercise, long rides in the surrounding country, business details, courts martial and conferences filled up his day. And added to his severe labours there was the serious handicap of ill-health. On February 15 he had a seizure. Byron, as usual when illness overtook him, instantly put himself on strictest diet and took hard riding and sword exercise. On April 9 he went out to ride though it threatened rain. He was caught in the rain and returned very wet and in a perspiration. He was ferried to his house, although his companion urged that he should ride and not risk sitting still in an open boat. "I should make a fine soldier," he replied, "if I did not know how to stand such a trifle as this." But irregularity of

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life and diet, the unhealthy marshes of Mesolonghi, and anxiety had done their work. This illness was Byron's last. He died on the morning of Easter Monday with Greece on his lips to the last.

The Greeks paid to him the honours due to a royal personage. A salute of thirty-seven guns, one for every year of the dead poet's age, was fired by order of Prince Mavrocordatos. A public mourning of twenty-one days was proclaimed, and signs of grief were everywhere. The Greeks would have had his body laid in Athens, but it was decided that it should be taken home. On July 16 Byron was buried in the village church of Hucknall Torkard, where the epitaph bears the simple statement that he died in Greece "engaged in the glorious attempt to restore that country to her ancient freedom and renown."

Byron's last verses bear date and title : "Jan. 22 ; on this day I complete my 36th year." They are not only descriptive of his circumstances and mood at the time, but are also strangely prophetic of what was to come.

## ON THIS DAY I COMPLETE MY THIRTY-SIXTH YEAR

### I

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,  
Since others it hath ceased to move :  
Yet, though I cannot be beloved  
Still let me love !

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## 2

My days are in the yellow leaf ;  
The flowers and fruits of Love are gone ;  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone !

## 3

The fire that on my bosom preys  
Is lone as some Volcanic isle ;  
No torch is kindled at its blaze—  
A funeral pile.

## 4

The hope, the fear, the zealous care,  
The exalted portion of the pain  
And power of love, I cannot share,  
But wear the chain.

## 5

But 'tis not *this*—and 'tis not *here*—  
Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor *now*  
Where Glory decks the hero's bier,  
Or binds his brow.

## 6

The Sword, the Banner, and the Field,  
Glory and Greece, around me see !  
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,  
Was not more free.

## 7

Awake ! (not Greece—she *is* awake !)  
Awake, my spirit ! Think through *whom*  
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,  
And then strike home !

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## 8

Tread those reviving passions down,  
Unworthy manhood !—unto thee  
Indifferent should the smile or frown  
Of Beauty be.

## 9

If thou regret'st thy youth, *why live ?*  
The land of honourable death  
Is here :—up to the Field, and give  
Away thy breath !

## 10

Seek out—less often sought than found—  
A soldier's grave, for thee the best ;  
Then look around, and choose thy ground,  
And take thy Rest.

## IX

BYRON'S poetical reputation has had a curious history. He has never suffered from neglect ; during his lifetime and since his death he had multitudes of admiring readers. They found in his poems verse of musical sweetness, images of striking beauty, and stories which stirred the feelings while they fascinated the understanding by the novelty of the scenes in which their action passed. But he has never wanted detractors and opponents. He was the poet of revolt, and all who represented orthodoxy, whether in politics, society or religion, were his bitter foes. It is true that all

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the great poets, his contemporaries, were equally in opposition to the established order in one direction or another. Wordsworth and Southey were in their early years rebels in a poetical and political sense as well as he. But each of these lived for many years beyond the age at which Byron died, and what in their case may be attributed to the extravagance of youth was compensated for by a long period of useful public service. But Byron had no opportunity of so retrieving what many would call the faults of his life and writings. That he would have done so there can be little doubt. If a seventeenth canto of "Don Juan" had appeared it would certainly have been different from the preceding sixteen. Every great nature grows nobler with maturity, and his work, which had been in the main critical and destructive would in all probability have been, if he had lived, positive and constructive. Whether he would have built a poem or a nation it is impossible to say.

Was Byron an artist in the sense that his poems were things of beauty, noble thoughts wedded to beautiful words? No one would claim this for him at all times or even mainly, notwithstanding the haunting beauty of many single lines and passages of the poems. Of the two component parts of a work of art—form and substance—Byron attended less to the former than to the latter. He wrote with too swift a pen to polish and refine what he had written. And so when we are told that Byron



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was guilty of solecisms in grammar, faulty rhythm, lapses in taste, we must admit the charge. But these do not detract in any appreciable degree from the greatness of his work, for it is not in his work as a stylist that his greatness lies. Some one has said that Byron's head gave him the impression of being at a higher temperature than that of other men ; the remark might be transferred to his poetry. It is the fervour, the intensity and sweep of his verse that constitute its greatness ; and when we combine with these qualities a consideration of its volume and its variety we have that impression of irresistible power that we associate with genius. Whatever he felt he felt strongly, and it cannot be denied that this strength of feeling was directed in the main against oppression and wrong.

Perhaps the greatest of all Byron's faults as a man was his egotism. From his earliest years he was self-regarding. Selfish he was not, for no man was more prodigal of benefits than he. But his early misfortunes made him suspicious, and the habit of considering every one with whom he came in contact as a possible enemy grew unchecked until it became the greatest flaw in a disposition essentially noble. The two defects which poisoned Byron's life were his lameness and his tendency to corpulency. It seems ludicrous to mention the two things together, but in Byron's eyes the one was as great a misfortune as the other, and he chafed against it as bitterly. Scott, too, was lame, but

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his deformity did not embitter his nature. When the two poets met for the first time, Scott noted a resentful watchfulness on the part of Byron, as if he were looking for cause of offence in any unguarded word or look which might show that his defect had been observed. We might read Scott's works and Lockhart's "Life of Scott" through without finding such a result arising from Scott's lameness.

But Byron was a born fighter. "You should not have warred against the world; it won't do," said Madame de Stael to him. If this spirit of universal antagonism was the reason for much of the hostility which Byron aroused in England, it was also the reason for his being accepted by all the nations of Europe as the greatest English poet of his time. Goethe in Germany, Stendhal, Sainte-Beuve and Taine in France, Mazzini in Italy, all claim for Byron the possession of supreme greatness. Not of course for the style of his verse, for while one scholar or critic of insight might appreciate the formal beauties of a foreign poet, it is impossible that these should form the ground for a general admiration of the poet by foreign nations. The reason is to be found in what Goethe calls his "grandeur and audacity," in his passionate love of freedom and in his hatred of convention and cant in every department of life.

Consider, for a moment, the condition of continental Europe in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and we shall understand why Byron's poetry had meaning to the men of his

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time, and to men in other countries rather than in his own. After the battle of Waterloo had finally destroyed the power of Napoleon, the forces of reaction reasserted themselves in full strength. In France, Spain, Germany, Italy, the power of the throne became supreme, and every attempt to preserve the freedom which had been won by the French Revolution was ruthlessly quelled. But it was impossible to destroy utterly the seeds of freedom which had been implanted in men's minds, and Byron's poems, translated into all the languages of Europe, became the fruitful soil in which those seeds grew to maturity. The revolutionists of 1830 and 1848 nourished themselves on the poetry of Byron, and a United Italy and a liberated Greece are examples of the influence which his poems exercised.

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